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THE
GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE"
"THE DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS" AND
"THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS"

JEREMIAH—MALACHI

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THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.—Jer. ii. 13.

1. "I SEE a wide extended valley. At its head, embosomed in trees of imperishable verdure and fragrance, amid which the birds sing strains of loveliest music, is a fountain that gushes with unabating force from depths which the eye of the vulture hath not seen. Its waters fling their diamond spray into the sunlight, and weave with its beams webs of unearthly glory. There is a safe and sheltered way to the fountain, forbidden to none, but open without fee or recompense to all. The way, however, is nearly forsaken, and the valley is covered throughout its length and breadth with busy workers, parched with thirst, and striving with might and main to hew out cisterns which the rains of heaven may fill, and from which they can drink at pleasure. This is the vision which the prophet saw, and God by his mouth tells us that amid all these cisterns there is none that will hold any water."[1]

2. In Hebrew the waters of a spring are called "living" (Gen. xxi. 19), because they are more refreshing and, as it were, life-giving than the stagnant waters of pools and tanks fed by the rains. Hence, by a natural metaphor, the mouth of a righteous man, or the teaching of the wise, and the fear of the Lord, are called a fountain of life. "The fountain of life" is with Jehovah; He is Himself the Fountain of living waters; because all life, and all that sustains or quickens life, especially spiritual life, proceeds from Him. Now in Ps. xix. 8 it is said: "The law of the Lord" —or, the teaching of Jehovah—"is perfect, reviving (or restoring) the soul"; and a comparison of the statement of Micah and

[1] E. Mellor, *The Hem of Christ's Garment*, 239.

Isaiah that "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" with the more figurative language of Joel and Zechariah, who speak of "a fountain going forth from the house of the Lord," and "living waters going forth from Jerusalem" suggests the inference that "the living waters," of which Jehovah is the perennial Fountain, are identical with His law as revealed through priests and prophets. It is easy to confirm this suggestion by reference to the river "whose streams make glad the city of God"; to Isaiah's poetical description of the Divine teaching, of which he himself was the exponent, as "the waters of Shiloah that go softly," Shiloah being a spring that issues from the Temple rock; and to our Lord's conversation with the woman of Samaria, in which He characterizes His own teaching as "living water," and as "a well of water, springing up unto eternal life."

3. But to forsake the law of God is to forsake God. And here it is stated most emphatically that the people had forsaken God: "They have forsaken *me*." And in forsaking God they had forsaken the source of all good. They had turned their backs upon the Fountain of God's holiness and grace. Every road was well trodden except the way to the Fountain. All the broad highways led elsewhere, and the holy way was now just a little field-track only rarely frequented, on which walked a mere remnant thirstily looking for "the consolation of Israel."

¶ If you never go to church, never have anything to do with a church of any kind, you may think you are not dealing with the great question of religion: but if religion is something of importance to the world, merely by letting it alone you are dealing with it, dealing wrongly with it, and it is a serious question whether you have any right to let it alone. What right has any man, when great questions are up, touching the welfare and future of humanity, to stand back merely because he happens to be comfortable, and to let them alone? You must deal with religion. Letting it alone is dealing with it, and may be dealing with it in the very way in which you have no right. For, mark you, religion is one of the most permanent elements in human life.[1]

[1] M. J. Savage.

I.

Forsaking the Fountain.

What happens when a people forsakes the Fountain of living waters?

1. First of all, when a nation turns its back upon the Fountain and loses sight of the supreme holiness of God, *its fine perception of all sacred things begins to grow dim.* This is not a statement of chance. It is the expression of a law which has universal sway. We retain any kind of refined perception only by continual fellowship with the highest of its kind. That is so with literary perception. It is so with exquisite musical discernment. It is so with delicate artistic taste. And so it is with a fine perception of sanctity. To retain our spiritual sensitiveness, it is imperative that we continue to hold fellowship with the Divine. If the fellowship with God is destroyed, the general sense of reverence is impaired.

¶ Religion, in its ultimate essence, is a sentiment of Reverence for a Higher than ourselves. Reverence can attach itself exclusively to a *person*; it cannot direct itself on what is *impersonal.* All the sentiments characteristic of religion presuppose a Personal Object, and assert their power only where Manhood is the type of Godhead.[1]

¶ This is the thing which I *know*—and which, if you labour faithfully, you shall know also—that in Reverence is the chief joy and power of life;—Reverence, for what is pure and bright in your own youth; for what is true and tried in the age of others; for all that is gracious among the living—great among the dead—and marvellous, in the Powers that cannot die.[2]

¶ As for Carlyle's religion, it may be said he had none, inasmuch as he expounded no creed and put his name to no confession. This is the pedantry of the schools. He taught us religion, as cold water and fresh air teach us health, by rendering the conditions of disease well-nigh impossible. For more than half a century, with superhuman energy, he struggled to establish the basis of all religions, "reverence and godly fear." "Love not pleasure, love God; this is the everlasting Yea."[3]

[1] *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, i. 240.
[2] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, § 65.
[3] Augustine Birrell, *Collected Essays*, i. 24.

2. The ebbing of reverence specially *leaves the family unhallowed.* The sanctity of family relationships finds the flower of its expression in family worship, and among the people of Israel this flower was withering away. They forsook the Fountain, and the family altar was overthrown. Surely we may here pass from ancient Israel directly and immediately to our own time. With what consternation and alarm do we look upon the general overthrow of the family altar. And the ruin is wider than is apparent in the lapse of common family devotion. For instance, is any one prepared to maintain that the fine reverence of children for their parents is a conspicuous feature of our modern life? There is a thinness in the relationship and an irreverence in the ordinary speech which do not conduce to the health and strength of our family communion.

¶ Fine reverence is not synonymous with restraint, nor does its practice induce anything like staleness and dull reserve. Noble reverence is rather the essential secret of an exhilarant and healthy freedom. I, for one, would welcome back into our modern life the fine, stately courtesy with which children honoured their parents in generations past; that high-born, fine-fibred, healthy grace which had such splendid expression in the days of old. But I do not know how such a reverence is to be recovered, or how it is to be kept alive and maintained in true and exquisite sensitiveness, unless there is a family altar in the home, and the corporate life of the family is centred in the reverent worship of Almighty God.[1]

¶ Although in his public life the Viceroy was of stern and unrelenting character and apparently indifferent to human life, the diary reveals in many places a tender heart and sympathetic nature. His devotion to his mother was most touching. Her last illness and death occurred in a distant province while he was immersed in important affairs of state at Tientsin. He memorialized the Dowager Empresses for a leave of absence to go to her bedside, in which he said: "She is eighty-three years old, and her constitution is breaking up; and the thought of her absent son continually recurs to her and makes her illness more dangerous. When memorialist heard this his heart burned with anxiety, and his sleep and his food were worthless. Since he bade her farewell thirteen years ago, he has never seen his mother's face."

A leave of absence for one month was granted him, but

[1] J. H. Jowett, in *The Christian World*, Sept. 3, 1914.

before he could start on his journey news came of her death, and he petitioned for the usual retirement of three years for mourning, but the Dowager Empresses answered that the state of public affairs would only allow of one hundred days. But this did not satisfy his grief at the failure to reach his mother before her death, and he sent another lengthy memorial, saying: "Remorse will haunt memorialist all his life, and there is a wound in his heart that prevents him privately from enjoying a moment's respite from pain, and publicly from being of any service to the state. . . . Even if he, separated beyond hope from meeting his mother, the living from the dead, were to spend three years in lamentations at her tomb, it would not avail to relieve his soul from the poignant and inexpressible regret he feels for his lack of filial duty." We find that years after, when absorbed in his official duties, he records that fourteen years had passed that day since his mother died, and that he secluded himself from all callers. "With all the incidents of my life, its trials and lamentations, its moments of joy and pride, with all and every affair of life, I cannot forget my celestial mother, and all she was and is to me."

The unique correspondence with the Dowager Empresses brings out one of the most distinguished traits of Chinese character—veneration for parents, which has become sanctified into religious worship, and also has exercised a marked influence on the political relations of the people, the Emperor being the parental head of the nation. If the fifth commandment of the Mosaic code were as faithfully observed by Christian nations as the central doctrine of the Confucian philosophy is practised by the Celestials, the social order of the Western world would be greatly improved.[1]

3. When the Fountain is forsaken, and reverence is thereby impaired, *the national chivalry also begins to decay.* When we lose the sense of the sacredness of the family it is difficult to retain our sense of the sacredness of man. Take the history of any nation you please. Take the history of the English people. In those seasons when God has been forsaken, it has inevitably happened that man has not been revered. Oppression may have ridden rampant in the earth, but nobody has cared. Chivalry has flown away with reverence, and the sacredness of humanity has been lost.

The English people have felt most deeply the oppressions of

[1] *Memoirs of the Viceroy, Li Hung Chang*, p. xvii.

other people when they themselves have lived nearest to God. Does anybody imagine for a moment that if our communion with the Almighty had been keen and undimmed, and we had consequently possessed a quick and vital sense of the sacredness of man, we should have quietly tolerated for so many years the barbarous iniquities of the Congo? One of the greatest and noblest boasts of the Apostle Paul was given in these words: "Who is made to stumble and I burn not?" And that was the flame of chivalry, kindled and kept alive in the Apostle's ceaseless communion with his God. Let that holy zeal begin to smoulder and the burning chivalry will soon die out. When God is forsaken chivalry is smitten at the heart. Let reverence die, and chivalry cannot hold her place.

¶ "As he lay," said Dean Stanley in his funeral sermon at Westminster Abbey, "the other day, cold in death, like the stone effigy of an ancient warrior, the 'fitful fever' of life gone, the strength of immortality left, resting as if after the toil of a hundred battles, this was himself idealized. From those mute lips there seemed to issue once more the living words with which he spoke, ten years ago, before one who honoured him with an unswerving faithfulness to the end. 'Some say'—thus he spoke in the Chapel of Windsor Castle—'some say that the age of chivalry is past, that the spirit of romance is dead. The age of chivalry is never past, so long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth, or a man or a woman left to say, I will redress that wrong, or spend my life in the attempt. The age of chivalry is never past so long as we have faith enough to say, God will help me to redress that wrong, or if not me, He will help those that come after me, for His eternal will is to overcome evil with good.'"[1]

II.

Hewing out Broken Cisterns.

1. If the Fountain is forsaken we must have something to make up for God. We cannot turn our cravings away from the Father, and by the very turning find these cravings appeased. The delicate tendrils which have clung to the Almighty must seek their support elsewhere. Our spiritual instincts will demand

[1] *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of his Life*, ii. 344.

attention, and they will need to be either narcotized or strenuously and constantly subdued. So it was with the people who had forsaken the Lord. The national life became a sort of restless vagrancy, and a wild quest took the place of a forsaken rest. "See thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways; a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure." All of which means that this people, having forsaken the place of their rest, ran about everywhere, dipping into everything, in the attempt to satisfy the instincts which had been denied their appointed springs.

¶ Tedium has been defined as a consciousness of time, just as in a morbid state one may become conscious of the throbbing of one's pulse. Having to wait at a railway station is a perfect torment to some people. For myself I remember this restlessness, which was very strong in me from about eighteen to eight-and-twenty. There was a constant craving to get on anyhow or any whither, only there must be no pause. I wonder how I should feel now if I were cut off from books, writing materials, and companions for some hours and were not travelling. I should be all right if some subject were buzzing in my head, as the Eastern Question has been lately, but without some such subject on which my thoughts settled naturally, I suspect I should be bored. I often grumble that I have no time to think. Should I think if I were condemned to solitary confinement for a week? What went on in men's minds when they were shut up in oubliettes? What goes on in the minds of sailors on watch or of sentries? Do they feel tedium, or does the mind, like the body, accommodate itself to the conditions in which it lives?[1]

2. Let us touch upon two of the most common of those broken cisterns at which the thirsty soul seeks to quench its cravings.

(1) There is the cistern of *pleasure*, embroidered with fruits and flowers, and bacchanalian figures, wrought at the cost of health and rest. It is in the very nature of passion not to yield the pleasure you seek from it if you push its gratification beyond the limits assigned to it in the constitution of our moral nature. It is with the passions as it is with the appetites, with which they have a close alliance and affinity—the more moderately they are satisfied within the limits of the claims of health, the higher is the

[1] *Life and Remains of the Rev. R. H. Quick*, 427.

satisfaction and the longer their susceptibilities of pleasure remain. The pampered appetite becomes the jaded appetite, and at length becomes the diseased and ruined appetite. And the man who is hewing out for himself a cistern of sensual pleasure is like the dram-drinker, who derives less stimulus and delight from the same quantity every day, and has accordingly to increase the dose to supply the same excitement; who at length gets beyond the range of gratification but finds that the passion holds him fast in its serpent coils even when all its joys are for ever fled.

¶ The human soul cannot live as an animal, seeking only to satisfy the physical nature and following only animal instincts; there is in it a rational faculty, which must have regard to a rational, or good, purpose in life, and control the animal nature in accordance with this purpose. In each of us the animal nature asserts itself, and every soul has to go through a struggle with the physical senses for mastery. If there be no such struggle, then the animal nature becomes dominant and the higher nature remains undeveloped. Only when the animal is thoroughly subdued can the soul attain to self-realization and union with the Supreme. Control of the appetites, in itself, will not suffice: the desire for sense-gratification must be rooted out. All the world over man is deeply sunken in sensuality, and a great part of his miseries and diseases are due to this. Most men in civilized communities are slaves to the senses. They indulge the animal nature, and in most cases never try to conquer it. With some it is not enough to live like animals;—for animals are pure and healthy in their instincts—nothing less than a debauching excess of sensuality will suffice them. They must wallow in slime. Indulgence in intoxicating liquor—one of the grosser forms of sensuality—is alone the cause of an almost inconceivable amount of misery. Then there are other forms of indulgence which, though much less obvious, are scarcely less serious in their consequences in wastage and disease. The external aspects of this sensuality are obvious; but the internal, or subjective, aspect, which is not the least serious, is understood only by few. Every sense-degraded soul is in misery and darkness, in degree according to the degree of its indulgence.[1]

(2) We find in another part of the valley another earnest worker, who is hewing out a cistern of *wealth*. Now what shall we say to this man? It will not serve any good purpose to call him hard names. You cannot scold a man out of any sin, still

[1] R. H. Hodgson, *Glad Tidings!* 15.

less out of the sin of covetousness. Nor must we bluntly deny all that he has said in praise of wealth. In fact, he might have said a great deal more in its eulogy without exceeding the limits of truth. The power of wealth—that is, its just and legitimate power—is enormous, and is increasing day by day; and there is no reason, except such as we find in the unsanctified and ill-regulated passions of men, why it should be ought else or less than an unmingled blessing. It is when we find men mistaking its functions and properties, and labouring to hew out of it a cistern of satisfaction, that we are constrained to remind them that such a cistern will hold no water.

¶ Far the most penetrating of all the influences that are impairing the moral and intellectual nerve of our generation remain still to be mentioned. The first of them is the immense increase of material prosperity, and the second is the immense decline in sincerity of spiritual interest. The evil wrought by the one fills up the measure of the evil wrought by the other. We have been, in spite of momentary declensions, on a flood-tide of high profits and a roaring trade, and there is nothing like a roaring trade for engendering latitudinarians. The effect of many possessions, especially if they be newly acquired, in slackening moral vigour, is a proverb. Our new wealth is hardly leavened by any tradition of public duty such as lingers among the English nobles, nor as yet by any common custom of devotion to public causes, such as seems to live and grow in the United States. Under such conditions, with new wealth come luxury and love of ease and that fatal readiness to believe that God has placed us in the best of possible worlds, which so lowers men's aims and unstrings their firmness of purpose. Pleasure saps high interests, and the weaken ing of high interests leaves more undisputed room for pleasure.[1]

¶ What was the danger of the possession of wealth in the eyes of Christ? What makes it so hard for the rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God? The danger and the difficulty both lie in the tendency of wealth to breed a spirit of self-satisfaction and contentment, a spirit which infects the soul with indifference, kills all high aspiration, deadens the sense of need, and even in human relationships leads to selfishness. Nor am I speaking now of great wealth, as we understand that phrase in the modern world. The collection of huge wealth into the hands of one individual was probably not known to Jesus, or even if it was known, it was no danger to the men to whom He spoke.

[1] John Morley, *On Compromise.*

And we should go very far astray in our interpretation of His words if we imagined that His warning as to the perils of riches applies only to millionaires. In truth, it applies to all who are living in circumstances of ease and comfort, and whose habits of life tend to deaden their sense of need. I believe we sum up the Christian attitude to wealth when we say that our Lord regarded it as a stewardship with which we are entrusted. Like all other gifts of life it is to be put to the largest and most fruitful use. It is not to be used merely as though it belonged to us; we are to think of it as loaned to us by God, and therefore to be used according to His will and purpose. The talents are placed in our hands, but we are to remember who put them there and that the day will come when we must render account of the use we have made of them. Even the man to whom comparatively little has been giveu will be judged by his use of that little. "He that is faithful in little is faithful also in much."[1]

How is the anxious soul of man befooled
In his desire,
That thinks an hectic fever can be cooled
In flames of fire;
Or hopes to rake full heaps of burnished gold
From nasty mire!

Whose gold is double with a careful hand,
His cares are double,
The pleasure, honour, wealth of sea and land
Bring but a trouble;
The world itself, and all the world's command,
Is but a bubble.
The strong desires of man's insatiate breast
May stand possessed
Of all that earth can give; but earth can give no rest.

The world's a seeming Paradise, but her own
And man's tormentor;
Appearing fixed, yet but a rolling stone
Without a tenter;
It is a vast circumference, where none
Can find a centre.
Of more than earth, can earth make none possessed;
And he that least
Regards this restless world, shall in this world find rest.

[1] S. M. Berry, *Graces of the Christian Character*, 169.

True rest consists not in the oft revying
Of worldly dross;
Earth's miry purchase is not worth the buying;
Her gain is loss;
Her rest but giddy toil, if not relying
Upon her cross.
How worldlings droyl for trouble! That fond breast
That is possessed
Of earth without a cross has earth without a rest.[1]

[1] Francis Quarles.

The Old Paths.

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THE OLD PATHS.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.—Jer. vi. 16.

IN the *Pilgrim's Progress* we are told that Christian and Hopeful "as they went on they wished for a better way. Now, a little before them, there was on the left hand of the road a meadow, and a stile to go over into it; and that meadow is called By-path Meadow. Then said Christian to his fellow, 'If this meadow lieth along by our wayside, let's go over into it.' Then he went to the stile to see; and, behold, a path lay along by the way on the other side of the fence. 'Tis according to my wish,' said Christian; 'here is the easiest going: come, good Hopeful, and let us go over.' Hopeful: 'But how if this path should lead us out of the way?' 'That's not like,' said the other. 'Look, doth it not go along by the wayside?' So Hopeful, being persuaded by his fellow, went after him over the stile. When they were gone over, and were got into the path, they found it very easy for their feet; and withal they, looking before them, espied a man walking as they did (and his name was Vain-Confidence); so they called after him, and asked him whither that way led. He said, 'To the Celestial Gate.' 'Look,' said Christian, 'did not I tell you so? By this you may see we are right.' So they followed, and he went before them. But, behold, the night came on, and it grew very dark; so that they that went behind lost the sight of him that went before. He, therefore, that went before (Vain-Confidence by name), not seeing the way before him, fell into a deep pit, which was on purpose there made by the prince of those grounds to catch vain-glorious fools withal, and was dashed in pieces with his fall." We need not be reminded how the story goes on to tell of the finding of the two pilgrims by Giant Despair, and all they suffered at his hands, nor how they did not recover their full joy and rest of soul again until,

as Bunyan has it, "they came to the King's highway again, and so were safe."

1. "See, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." We know quite well how ninety-nine people out of every hundred interpret this passage. It is one of the great texts of the Bible, and it has been appealed to again and again through all the generations. There are many who say that the old paths are the paths in which our fathers and forefathers walked, and they say to us, "If we are to do the right thing, and if we are to realize the great end of life, we must follow closely in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. There must be no change in our theological belief; we must believe just what our fathers before us believed. If we do not do that we are leaving the old paths. And there must be no change in our forms of worship; we must worship God precisely as our fathers did."

Is that the meaning of the text? There are reasons for believing that it is not.

(1) *Jeremiah* himself is the first reason. Jeremiah was the great religious reformer of his day. In the midst of a stolid and stiff-necked generation, he was the great mouthpiece of progress. He was a religious agitator. He gave neither king, nor priest, nor people any rest. He was probably a priest himself. He was what we should call a regularly ordained minister. It is true he got very little support from his brethren. They looked askance at him, and asked where this young man was going to lead them. He was very unsparing in his denunciation of their cold and hard formalism and their worse sins of covetousness. They were willing to condone the sins of their people for the sake of a pecuniary consideration. Now, Jeremiah was a very thorn in the side of these men, who, no doubt, called themselves old-fashioned Jews. He was intensely social and political in his teaching. He dealt with subjects that were startlingly modern. He was interested in the present-day life of the people. When he began to prophesy, he was, apparently, just a young man in close touch with his time: with his fingers on the nation's pulse, prescribing Divine remedies for her slackness and dulness of spiritual life as well as for the fevered restlessness of

her outward and sensuous life. He was severely practical. It was not doctrine he was concerned for so much as life. He knew perfectly well that if you cross-questioned this people, you would find them orthodox. Indeed, he himself says as much. He says: "Though they say, the Lord liveth; surely they swear falsely." They say it, but they do not believe it. It is their creed, it is not their faith. Their doctrine is true, but it is not living. It has no relation to their life. They do not believe it. They hold it as a convenient intellectual formula and national creed—but they do not honour it with their own personal loyalty. Their orthodoxy is lifeless, barren, soulless. It has become a hollow sham and a miserable falsehood. It is worn as spotless clothing to veil the hideous corruption of the spirit. It is separable from the soul; and if you tear it off, you find the life it covers is foul and loathsome and false. These men, who boasted that they stood where their fathers did and held to the old paths, were aliens to the spirit and life of the sons of God; and Jeremiah felt that in the name of righteousness it was well that they should know.

¶ We cannot but believe that in the future the whole conception of orthodoxy is destined to grow less and less prominent. Less and less men will ask of any opinion, "Is it orthodox?" More and more they will ask, "Is it true?" More and more the belief in the absolute safety of the freest truth-seeking, in truth-seeking as the only safe work of the human mind, will deepen and increase. Truth will come to seem not a deposit, fixed and limited, but an infinite domain wherein the soul is bidden to range with insatiable desire, guarded only by the care of God above it and the Spirit of God within it, educated by its mistakes, and attaining larger knowledge only as it attains complete purity of purpose and thoroughness of devotion and energy of hope. As that truer understanding of what truth is grows wide and clear, men will cease to talk or think much of orthodoxy, and the humble service which it is made to render it will render all the better when it is stripped of the purple and the sceptre, the dominion and tyranny, to which it has no right.[1]

(2) Another reason is the *Bible*. For if there is a book in the world that illustrates on every page of it the principle of development, the principle of evolution, the principle of change, it is this book that we call the Bible. Take, for example, the name of God.

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 196.

Go to the Book of Genesis, and you find that the old Hebrews called God "Elohim," the strong one. That was their idea of the Creator—not a bad idea, not a wrong idea. It is a great and glorious truth. But come down the stream, come down to the time when the Lord Jesus Christ clothed Himself in our humanity, and listen to His teaching. Is it the teaching of the Book of Genesis regarding God? Not at all. Jesus tells us that God is our Father. He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven." What a difference—almost as far as the East is from the West—between the "Elohim" of Genesis and the "our Father" of the gospel!

¶ At first, faith need not be more than the acceptance of a few central facts of revelation. These will be sufficient to illuminate and justify that primitive, deep-seated instinct of kinship with God which we recognized at the beginning as the raw material of religion, and which we saw giving expression to itself in an imperfectly understood ritual of sacrifice and communion. Such a faith, again, will be sufficient to illuminate and justify the obstinate conviction that the values which we blindly pursue and cherish are perfectly realized and eternally conserved in Him who is the Word and Wisdom of the Father.

What an unlimited opening does faith thus provide for the development of religion; for the garnering of religious experience in prayer and meditation; for the confident quest of the true, the beautiful, and the good; for the practice of fellowship with all who share the clansmen's sacrificial feast and are pledged thereby to mutual service![1]

(3) A third reason is the *history of the Church.* For when we come down the history of the Christian Church we find precisely the same thing; change is stamped on every age and generation. We do not worship as our fathers worshipped fifty years ago, and we do not think as our fathers did in theological matters fifty years ago. "The thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns." We cannot stand still. Why, if men acted on that principle the world would never have developed at all; there would have been no Christianity, no Reformation, no change whatever in men's thoughts and ideas through the ages. That is not God's purpose. We are all children, and all in God's school, and God is teaching us every day; and if we are true children of

[1] A. Chandler, *Faith and Experience*, 102.

the Father we are coming to know Him more and more intimately and fully. We cannot stand in the old paths in that sense.

¶ There is no saint in the Congregational denomination held —and deservedly held—in higher honour than Richard Baxter, who suffered imprisonment for his loyalty to the truth. Yet no man was more fiercely assailed by the rigid doctrinaires of his day as being a heretic. And his biographer, in defending him, uses this quaint illustration. "The discussion of truth and the agitation of doctrines have always resulted in good to the Church and to the world. Even the waters of Bethesda in the very house of mercy itself needed to be agitated and disturbed to renew their healing power. It is, therefore, unseemly in theologians that, when some Doctor Angelicus descends among them and agitates the settled waters of their dull and stagnant orthodoxy, then always a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered, creep from the five points of their five porches to brandish their crutches against the intruder, or to mutter their anathemas against the innovation, instead of welcoming the benignant visitor, sharing in the healthiness of the agitation, and becoming healed of whatsoever disease they had." You see, then, that if you are brave enough to trouble the settled waters of the theological Bethesda, you must expect to be threatened with the crutches of the very men you are anxious to heal. But you will remember that, long centuries ago, the Apostle Paul had to defend himself to the governor of the Jews because, as he said, "After the way that they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." And you will remember that, when the Catholic Church excommunicated Wycliffe, he was bold enough to say that, when they had first made Christ a heretic, it was a little matter to call His followers by the same name. Yes, there are men who would make a heretic of Christ. Some of the saintliest heroes who ever lived have been driven out of the Churches because, "after the Way that men called heresy, so worshipped they the God of their fathers." It may be the highest honour to be called a heretic, if it comes from your loyalty to the living Christ and your impatience of phrases and forms that have concealed His reality, instead of expressing His relation to God and man.[1]

2. What, then, is the old way? It is simply the way of rightness. It is the good way because it is the way of goodness; it is the way of the keeping of the commandments of God. What Jeremiah meant was this: if the children of Israel were to be

[1] C. Silvester Horne.

redeemed they must go back to the old paths of righteousness. They would never be saved by mere forms of ritual. They must go back to the old paths of right doing. "Do justly," says the prophet Micah, "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." And Jeremiah comes to the people in their distress, in their moral and spiritual degradation, and he says to them: "There is just one hope for you, you must begin to do right, you must abandon all your unfaithful ways, you must go back to the old paths God has laid down from all eternity for man's life—the paths of justice and truth."

¶ Even an old house has a haunting grace enough, as a place where men have been born and died, have loved and enjoyed and suffered; but a road like this, ceaselessly trodden by the feet of pilgrims, all of them with some pathetic urgency of desire in their hearts, some hope unfulfilled, some shadow of sickness or sin to banish, some sorrow making havoc of home, is touched by that infinite pathos that binds all human hearts together in the face of the mystery of life. What passionate meetings with despair, what eager upliftings of desirous hearts, must have thrilled the minds of the feeble and travel-worn companies that made their slow journeys along the grassy road! And one is glad to think, too, that there must doubtless have been many that returned gladder than they came, with the burden shifted a little, the shadow lessened, or at least with new strength to carry the familiar load. For of this we may be sure, that, however harshly we may despise what we call superstition, or however firmly we may wave away what we hold to have been all a beautiful mistake, there is some fruitful power that dwells and lingers in places upon which the hearts of men have so concentrated their swift and poignant emotions—for all, at least, to whom the soul is more than the body, and whose thoughts are not bounded and confined by the mere material shapes among which, in the days of our earthly limitations, we move uneasily to and fro.[1]

3. This is the very truth which Christ always uttered. When the scribe came to Him demanding "What must I do to have eternal life?" He answered at once, "Keep the commandments." And the Apostles after Him used the same language. "Circumcision is nothing," said St. Paul, "and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." Nothing can take the place of that. And if the gospel was new, it was new only in this that it made possible the keeping of the commandments of

[1] A. C. Benson, *The Silent Isle*, 381.

God. It made it possible for men to find the old paths, the good way, and to walk therein.

And so Jeremiah is at one with Jesus in offering rest of soul to those who find the old paths and walk in them. Only Jesus had the power, which Jeremiah had not, of *giving* the rest. Jeremiah could only recall the people to the way which their fathers found good; Jesus could call them to Himself. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." And how great is the difference between the memory of the past and the power of the present; how great is the difference between the thought of the law that is dead and the thought of the living, loving, self-sacrificing Redeemer.

¶ David said long ago when his heart had been ill at ease, and he had felt the burden of his sin, My soul, O God, can find rest only in Thee. "Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." And when you have found it, and when by-and-by you come to pass through the valley of the shadow, you will be able, like David of old, and with full assurance, to say: "I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."[1]

¶ The desire of rest planted in the heart is no sensual nor unworthy one, but a longing for renovation and for escape from a state whose every phase is mere preparation for another equally transitory, to one in which permanence shall have become possible through perfection. Hence the great call of Christ to men, that call on which St. Augustine fixed as the essential expression of Christian hope, is accompanied by the promise of rest; and the death bequest of Christ to men is peace.[2]

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

[1] R. Borland.

[2] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. ii. sec. i. chap. vi. (*Works*, iv. 114).

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at the door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.[1]

[1] Christina G. Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, 339.

The Call of Life.

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THE CALL OF LIFE.

Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!—Jer. ix. 2.

JEREMIAH is the most human of all the prophets. He takes us into the secrets of his inner life, and we are made to know his misgivings and questionings. He had to be a prophet of God in the saddest and darkest day. It fell to him to speak for God when Jerusalem was hastening to its doom. His ministry is as the bright evening sun, which amid the gathering darkness sheds a glory over Judah, as it sinks into the night. We cannot imagine a situation more pathetic and painful. He has to watch the lingering agony of his exhausted land, to tend it during the alternate fits of despair and futile hope which precede the end. He is as the minister who has to accompany the condemned criminal to the scaffold, and who knows that the criminal is his own brother, flesh of his flesh. His heart is at war with his duty. He is in the cruellest dilemma. He would give all he has to make Judah happy and Jerusalem prosperous, and yet he has to declare their inevitable fate. How thankful he would be if he had never known the truth and if it had not been his to speak it. He is full of pity for the miseries of the people and the unhappy fate of his beloved fatherland, and yet he foresees the end and must declare it; and, truest patriot who ever lived though he be, he must bear the stigma of a traitor to his country for the sake of God and of truth.

No wonder that in all the fellowship of the prophets Jeremiah is by far the most unwilling and reluctant. Other prophets, like Isaiah, with his "Here am I—send me," stand boldly forward, exulting in their gifts; but Jeremiah is always shrinking, protesting, craving leave to retire. Unassisted by circumstance, by nature timid, easily wearied and impatient, distrustful of his own gifts, he was kept to his great career

solely and wholly by the sense that God had called him and predestined him. And that sense was so generally one of unmixed labour and pain that he is almost constantly found praying to be released from it. If Isaiah's watchword was: "Here am I—send me," Jeremiah's might have been, "I would be anywhere else but here—let me go." It was out of this besetting mood that the cry arose: "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men!"

Let us look, first, at the prophet's wish to escape from life's stern demands; and, secondly, at the obligation to persevere in the path of duty.

I.

The Wish to Escape.

1. "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" That is not a prayer for solitude. It is some wayside caravanserai or hotel that Jeremiah longs for; and there he would have been far less alone than in his unshared home at Jerusalem. No, it is not a prayer for solitude, but a prayer to be set where a man can enjoy all the interest of life without having any of its responsibility; where all men are wayfarers and come and go, like the river past the bank on which you lie the long summer afternoon, and rouse your pity and help you to muse and perhaps to sing, but never touch your conscience; where you may be an artist or a poet, or only a good fellow, but cannot possibly be required to be a prophet. It was so terrible to have to look below the surface of life, to know people long enough both to judge them with a keener conscience than themselves and to love them with a breaking heart. Oh, to have no other work in life than to watch the street from the balcony window, than to feel the interest and glitter of life, and to achieve your duty towards your fellows by a kindliness and a courtesy that are never put to the strain of prolonged acquaintance!

The trade-routes had such places dotted along their course, where travellers and traders could put up for the night. The caravanserai was often a busy place, for all its cheerless furnish-

ing; there would be men coming and going, hurrying on their pleasure or their business, merchants, court-officials, or ordinary travellers, full of news and alive with interests of every kind. There, thought Jeremiah, I could feel at home; I could content myself with letting things go unchallenged. He wanted evidently to be no more than a looker-on at life. He was tired, not so much of human beings as of responsibility for any of them. Out on the steppes, in a khan, he could still keep in touch with some currents of existence, and yet be no more than a cool, indifferent spectator.

¶ Thoreau, that singular American who has written some beautiful essays, who went and lived in the woods, says that he chose so to spend his days, "on the promenade deck of the world, an outside passenger, where I have freedom in my thought and in my soul am free."[1]

¶ Pythagoras was once asked contemptuously by a Greek tyrant who he was and what was his particular business in the world. The philosopher replied that at the Olympic games some people came to try for the prizes, some to dispose of their merchandise, some to enjoy themselves and meet their friends, and some to look on. "I," said Pythagoras, "am one of those who come to look on at life." Bacon, in telling the story, adds: "But men must know that in this theatre of man's life it is reserved only for God and angels to be lookers-on."[2]

2. What moved Jeremiah to harbour this wish?

(1) He tells us himself that it was because he was so out of touch with the people, and because they had, as by a national apostasy, departed from God. He felt often as if he alone stood for God amid a faithless generation. "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh truth." And again he says, "From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely." It was a terrible isolation in which he stood: in the crowded market-place this man was as much alone as in the widest solitudes. One faithful disciple we know he had, and a few there must have been who listened to his voice; but

[1] A. Ramsay, *Studies in Jeremiah*, 61.
[2] J. Moffatt, *Reasons and Reasons*, 45.

these were so few and far between, and they were so little in evidence, that they did not affect the universal antipathy with which he was regarded. None shared his ideals; none offered to God the worship of righteousness.

There are moments and moods when even a strong nature will feel tempted to escape, or to wish to escape, from the pressure of responsibility into a position where it would only be necessary to look on. Such was Jeremiah's case at this period of his career. He felt disappointed and disquieted with his age. He was at that critical phase of life when the first flush of enthusiasm, which throws men into eager contact with their fellows, has been succeeded by a profound sense of the corruption and self-will and greed which sometimes thwart an enterprise of religious or national reform. He had failed to carry the people with him; he was unpopular; and he was disheartened. At one moment he was ready to weep for his land. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." That is the anguish of a true patriot over evils which are being allowed to eat away the heart of a nation, over the rampant selfishness which forgets the rights and claims of God or of one's fellow-men, over the indifference of people to human pain and to Divine appeals.

¶ When a preacher has to say, "Who hath received our report?" a true man's heart knows its own bitterness. The hopes of his day of ordination and the meagre results attained by all his labours go not well together.

In the glory of youth the young man went,
His heart with pride was stirred.
They should yield, he cried, to the message sent
And force of the burning word.

The long years passed, and a wearied man
Crept back to the old home door;
I have spoken my word and none has heard,
And the great world rolls as before.[1]

(2) He had none of the ordinary solaces by which such loneliness is relieved. He had neither wife nor child; he had not the interest of any occupation outside of his prophetic career;

[1] A. Ramsay, *Studies in Jeremiah*, 35.

he was shut off from mingling in the social life of the people. Regretfully he tells us that he was not permitted to rejoice with the joyful or to sorrow with the sorrowful. What, then, is left to this lonely man? Is not this a moment of general dissolution and shipwreck, when the terrible cry may be raised, "Let each man look to himself; let him save himself who can"? The State was being broken up: monarchy, nation, ritual, temple were all being thrown into the whirlpool of ruin. The individual was being left to his own resources; the best that could be hoped was that men might escape with their lives.

¶ We live in groups, in societies; but these, after all, touch only upon our upper levels. Rarely do they reach the realm where *we* dwell. We live in crowded cities, but you can be lonelier in Fleet Street than in the centre of Sahara. Nature introduces us, at different stages of our career, to successive phases and varieties of loneliness. With many of us she begins early. Is there an acuter experience than that of the boy, away from the home he has never before left, on his first night at school? To many a sensitive soul it has been the first night in hell. He will have many more nights there—to find what an excellent place hell is as a school of culture. Later on, he will meet his other lonelinesses. The higher his nature the more acute they will be. Think of the solitude of the man of genius; of the leader, the teacher in advance of his age! His followers have got a living personality in front of them; the sight of him warms their hearts, stirs their enthusiasm. But what has *he* in front of him—Luther on his way to Worms, Jesus treading the road to Jerusalem? No visible leader for them; nothing for them but the invisible! Who is there to comprehend them, who to share their inmost thought? Their cry is that of Confucius of old: "Alas! there is no one that knows me, . . . but there is Heaven —that knows me." Solitude is the lot of all the teachers, of all the originals. Says Newman in one of his letters: "God intends me to be lonely. He has so framed my mind that I am in a great measure beyond the sympathies of other people, and thrown upon Himself." There he speaks for all who have trodden the higher pathways.[1]

3. We can all understand why such a wish, with all the power of an enchantment, should arise in this man's heart, for it has had a place in our own. Without a tithe of his reasons and excuse,

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 153.

there can be few of us who have not felt the impulse to a self-regarding life. Why should we not limit our interests to our own concerns? What hinders that we look only to our own ease and comfort and personal salvation? Kingdom of God, Church of Jesus Christ, nation, city, condition of the people, cause of freedom and righteousness—all this that stands for what is beyond the individual and the selfish—why should we have a care for such things? "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men!"

(1) We yearn for an escape from *the responsibilities of life*—not "all the weary weight of this unintelligible world," but just the burdens that lie at our own door. For as life advances—if it is being *well* lived—responsibilities are bound to gather. Business increases, influence extends, the life of the home is larger and fuller and deeper. In hours of high courage, too, and when the heart is strong, men enter on the public service of their city, and that weight must be carried through many a thankless day. So again is the prophet's mood begotten. Men long for release—to lay the burden down. They think how supremely happy life would be without the black care that sits behind the horseman. That thought was not a stranger to Jeremiah.

(2) We long to escape from *monotony*. When day after day men rise to the same task, when morning by morning—spring, summer, autumn, winter—the hands have to take up the same weary drudgery, then sooner or later comes the rebellious hour when the heart craves passionately for escape. That hour comes sometimes through the reading of books which bring home to us the rich and varied action of humanity; sometimes when other lives that seem so unrestrained are brought into bitter contrast with our own; and sometimes when the first signs of spring have come, when the awakening earth woos us to liberty, when the warmth of the sun and the breath of the wind are on us. In such ways the mood of rebellion is begotten. We fret and chafe at the dulness of our days. The dreary monotony of daily work grows odious. There surges within us the longing for release. That very longing surged in the noble heart of Jeremiah.

(3) There are hours when we wish to escape from *ourselves*. We begin by thinking that if we could change our lot we should be very happy and contented. We imagine that if we could only

get away into new scenes, it would be infinitely restful. But as we grow older, and perhaps wiser, we discover that, go where we will, we carry our own hearts with us, and that what we really craved for—although we did not know it—was not a change of scene but change of self. We come to know ourselves so well as life proceeds—our weaknesses, our limitations. There are men who have everything to make them happy, yet somehow they have not the genius to be happy. Hence springs the strange rebellion of unrest; the wish for the wings of the morning that we may fly away, not merely from the burden of our lot, but from the heavier burden of ourselves.

¶ Men often blind themselves to facts, and weave theories to make the burden lighter. They speak of sin and death and poverty and care in a way that is irreconcilable with facts. It is not truth they are seeking, it is ease. It is not actuality, it is relief. They want the world to be golden, and they make it so, though it is full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despair—and remember, there is a cowardice of mind, no less than a cowardice upon the field of battle. When men turn away from the straight gaze of Christ, and when they run to philosophies and theories which have no cry in them, no cross, no blood—only harmonious and flattering music—that is another betrayal of the strange yet quenchless longing to escape.[1]

¶ I suppose that the most exalted and least "casual" of worldly joys consists in the adequate recognition by the world of high achievement by ourselves. Yet it is notorious that—

> It is by God decreed
> Fame shall not satisfy the highest need.

It has been my lot to know not a few of the famous men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true. Like all other "moral" satisfactions, this soon palls by custom, and as soon as one end of distinction is reached another is pined for. There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their misery so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there. I take it, then, as unquestionably true that this whole negative side of the subject proves a vacuum in the soul of man which nothing can fill save faith in God.[2]

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Unlighted Lustre*, 109.
[2] G. J. Romanes, *Thoughts on Religion*.

In the ancient orderly places, with a blank and orderly mind,
We sit in our green walled gardens and our corn and oil increase;
Sunset nor dawn can wake us, for the face of the heavens is kind;
We light our taper at even and call our comfort peace.

Peaceful our clear horizon, calm as our sheltered days
Are the lilied meadows we dwell in, the decent highways we tread.
Duly we make our offerings, but we know not the God we praise,
For He is the God of the living, but we, His children, are dead.

I will arise and get me beyond this country of dreams,
Where all is ancient and ordered and hoar with the frost of years,
To the land where loftier mountains cradle their wilder streams,
And the fruitful earth is blessed with more bountiful smiles and tears,—

There in the home of the lightnings, where the fear of the Lord is set free,
Where the thunderous midnights fade to the turquoise magic of morn,
The days of man are a vapour, blown from a shoreless sea,
A little cloud before sunrise, a cry in the void forlorn—

I am weary of men and cities and the service of little things,
Where the flamelike glories of life are shrunk to a candle's ray.
Smite me, my God, with Thy presence, blind my eyes with Thy wings,
In the heart of Thy virgin earth show me Thy secret way![1]

II.

The Obligation to Persevere.

1. The day came when Jeremiah could gratify his wish. After Jerusalem was taken and everything was lost, a home in Babylon

[1] John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness.*

was offered to him. He could have had dignified ease. He had friends at court; the Babylonian general was ready to secure for him all his heart could wish. He could enjoy well-earned repose. Now at the end of the long day it was fitting that rest be appointed to the labourer. Twenty years before, the longing had been strong within him for just such an opportunity as this, and he had resisted it; but now at the long last, the chance has come his way. Will he put it past him, or will he eagerly seize it? He is dragged along as a prisoner, and there, while the manacles are struck off his wrists, this tempting future is opened up before him. And yet the issue is not for a moment in doubt. He cannot even now find it in his heart to leave his people. The bald narrative cannot hide from us the heroism and renunciation involved in the act. "Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land." In a passion of despair he broke out with the cry, "Oh that I might leave my people!" But he did not leave them. He was too noble and generous at heart to become a mere looker-on. For this craving is a moral weakness. The heroic natures in every age are not seated on the balcony; they are down among their fellow-men, bearing the strain and stress of their position, identifying themselves willingly with the people among whom it may have pleased God to cast their lot, and brave enough to meet

> The fierce confederate storm
> Of sorrow, barricaded evermore
> Within the walls of cities.

¶ There is a little children's hymn which goes like this—

> Had I the wings of a dove I would fly,
> Far, far away, far away.

If that is the use to which we would put our wings, it is an infinite mercy that they have never grown. We are here as stewards, and a steward must be faithful. We are called to be soldiers, not to be deserters. We are set here by an ordering God not to fly away, but to hold on and fight on and trust on to the end.[1]

2. What was it that moored and anchored Jeremiah to his hard life in Jerusalem? Why could he not tear himself away

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Unlighted Lustre*, 111.

from it? The whole secret is out when you emphasize these words "that I might leave *my people*!" There rested on his spirit a sense of his oneness with his people far more stringent than ever prophet had felt before, a sympathy with their sufferings which breaks forth in some of the most pathetic cries in all literature, a consciousness of their sins which makes him feel their guilt to the depths of his being.

God had not sent him to earth to be as separate from the life of man as a musing man is from the river flowing past his feet. God had sent him, not to watch life from a balcony, but leaping down to share it: not to live in an inn, where a man is not even responsible for the housekeeping, but has only his way to pay. God had begotten Jeremiah into a nation. He had made him a citizen. He had given him a patriot's lot, with the patriot's conscience and heart. Jeremiah had been forced to grow familiar with men, to find them out by living on their own level, to see habit slowly grow and falsehood surely betray itself, and fathers' evil descend to children, and policies reap their fruits, and systems get tried by events, and, moreover, death come down. This was his destiny through all the mingled sin and pity of the linked generations—to feel at once his judgment upon men grow keener and more hopeless and his love for them deeper and more yearning.

Under the power of such a union Jeremiah lived all his days. He acknowledged it; he sought more and more to feel the force of it. He was an Israelite indeed. Israel in him struggled against its doom. The dumb, inarticulate mind of the people found a voice in him. He wept over them; he palliated their offences; he confessed for them their sins. He overflowed with human sympathies; he had a very rich and tender heart, and with all the wealth of love with which it was dowered he loved the people. These dull, impenitent people felt nothing; their sins, which drew hot, scalding tears from Jeremiah, did not cost them a thought; but the spiritual distress, the keener conscience, the agony of estrangement from God, the knowledge of His judgment upon sin—all this was in Jeremiah heavy as lead, and he bore it for the people.

¶ Sir Leslie Stephen contributes some interesting recollections as well as a sympathetic appreciation of his friend Lowell, whom he knew intimately for many years. "Lowell's patriotism,"

he writes, "was not the belief that the country which had produced him must be the first in the world; or that the opinions which he happened to have imbibed in his childhood must be obviously true to every one but fools; or a simple disposition to brag, engendered out of sheer personal vanity by a thirst for popularity. It was clearly the passion which is developed in a pure and noble nature with strong domestic affections; which loves all that is best in the little circle of home and early surroundings; which recognizes spontaneously in later years the higher elements of the national life; and which, if it lead to some erroneous beliefs, never learns to overlook or to estimate too lightly the weaker and baser tendencies of a people. Most faiths, I fear, are favourable to some illusions, and I will not suggest that Lowell had none about his countrymen. But such illusions are at worst the infirmity of a noble mind, and Lowell's ardent belief in his nation was, to an outsider, a revelation of greatness both in the object of his affections and in the man who could feel them."[1]

¶ It has been said that the Bible, especially the New Testament, does not recognize patriotism. M. Renan says that Christianity kills patriotism. "Religion," he says, "is the organization of self-devotement and renunciation—the State-patriotism is the organization of egoism."

One answer to this is by reference to facts. Have the most religious nations and times been the most unpatriotic? Or the most religious men? On the contrary, the grandest national movements have had the inspiration of religion. The Commonwealth and Puritans in England, the Covenanters in Scotland, Cromwell, Milton, Rutherfurd, James Guthrie, had an intense national feeling. The Cavaliers, with Church and King, associated the two. Abraham Lincoln was a religious man, and there was a deep feeling of religion in Stonewall Jackson. How it ranged them on opposite sides is another question; but that the sentiments can unite, and generally have done so, is written in all history.

It is quite true that religion gives a man something he cannot sacrifice to what some call patriotism—meaning by patriotism national pride or material advantage. But this is not patriotism. Unless a man loves something higher than these he cannot love his country wisely and worthily. He must do for his country what he would do for himself, love truth and justice most, seeking these for his country and himself at the cost of lower and passing interests.[2]

[1] *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, ii. 497.
[2] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 115.

3. This heroic identification of himself with the interests of a faulty people marks out Jeremiah as a prototype of Jesus. When our Lord was on earth, some of His contemporaries were reminded of Jeremiah. "Whom do men say that I am? Some say, Jeremiah." Why, we are not told. But for us Jesus resembles Jeremiah in this at least, that He did identify Himself, though in a far deeper degree, with the interests of a self-willed and rebellious people. He, too, shared their reproach and put up with their misunderstandings and ingratitude, in order to carry out God's purpose. He, too, had to meet and master the temptation to decline further association with their unfaithfulness. "O faithless and perverse generation," He once broke out, "how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?" There were moments when the incredulity and obstinacy of men were almost too much even for His great patience. But He triumphed over all such inclinations to disavow responsibility for His race.

When Jesus set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, He knew that He was going to be betrayed and crucified there, and He was speaking to His disciples about it all. And Peter said to Him, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." And Jesus, in a flash, turned upon Peter—"Get thee behind me, Satan." Why that intensity, that burning word as if from a heart stirred to its very centre? Why, but because Christ had been tempted like Jeremiah to throw the burden down and flee away: and the intensity and strength of the rebuke, which broke like a sea wave on Simon's heart tells how the temptation to escape was crushed.

But thou would'st not *alone*
Be saved, my father! *alone*
Conquer and come to thy goal,
Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself;
And, at the end of thy day,
O faithful shepherd! to come,
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

The Pride of Jordan.

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THE PRIDE OF JORDAN.

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?—Jer. xii. 5.

THE prophet Jeremiah occupies a unique position in Israelitish history from the fact that to him fell the bitter and ungrateful task of contending in vain against the main currents of his time, religiously and politically, and finally perishing in consequence of his faithfulness to his mission. Of no other prophet of the first rank can the same thing be said. The prophets were often severe and scathing critics of their age and their contemporaries, but none of them was so tragically situated as Jeremiah. He had to see the nation drifting straight to ruin, ruin that overtook it within a few short years of the beginning of his ministry, and he knew himself helpless to avert it. With the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the disaster he had foreseen came to pass, and he shared in the misery of it, being afterwards slain, it is said, by some of the Jewish refugees themselves in their flight from the scenes of horror that ensued. But long before that he had been maltreated and imprisoned for his supposed unpatriotic conduct in prophesying the humiliation of his own people.

His fellow-townsmen, even his brethren and the house of his father, even they dealt treacherously with him. The sacred tie of kindred was too weak to restrain the outbreak of fanatical hate. The priestly houses had winced beneath the vehement denunciations of their young relative, and could bear it no longer. A plot was therefore set on foot, and under the show of fair words they conspired to take the prophet's life. He had not known of his danger but for Divine illumination: "The Lord gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it: then thou shewedst me their doings." Stunned with the sudden discovery, Jeremiah turned to God with

remonstrance and appeal. Conscious of his own rectitude and of the rectitude of God, he was for a moment caught in the outer circles of the whirlpool of questioning which has ever agitated the minds of God's oppressed ones, concerning the unequal distribution of earthly lots.

Now, God answers such questionings as these in different ways—sometimes by showing His servant the true state of the ungodly, making him "to understand their end"; sometimes by revealing to the righteous the vast superiority of their portion over that of the ungodly; sometimes by gently soothing the ruffled spirit; at other times, as here, by rousing rebuke and sharp remonstrance, bidding him bethink himself, if he broke down under these comparatively small trials, how would he bear up when much more terrible ones had to be endured? If running with "footmen" was too much for him, then how would he "contend" with the swift "horses"? If he could feel secure only in a quiet land, how would he do in a region full of peril like that of the jungle-land, the lair of the lion and other fierce beasts of prey, which stretched along the banks of the Jordan? Greater trials were to come to him than he had as yet known; how would he meet them if he failed in the presence of these lesser ones?

The text is thus God's answer to the prophet's remonstrance. Let us look, first, at the Remonstrance, and then at the Divine Response.

I.

The Remonstrance.

Jeremiah is here kicking against the pricks which have wounded the feet of men for centuries—how to account for the fact that, in a world governed by a righteous God, righteousness should often have to suffer so much. But in the midst of the cruel experience he never lets go his grip of God. "Righteous art thou, O God," he says—whatever comes, that is the first established fact of life. "Yet," he continues in holy boldness, "would I reason the cause with thee: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they at peace that deal very treacherously?" His indignant soul, on fire for justice, cries

out that it ought not to be so. But the undercurrent of the complaint is not the seeming prosperity of the wicked; it is his own pain and sorrow and terrible adversity. We do not ask a solution of the universe till we are forced to ask a solution of our own place and lot in it. God's providence seemed perfect to Job till he was caught in the tempest and tossed aside broken. We are not much concerned about mere abstract injustice. Jeremiah's *wherefore* about the wicked is really a *why* about himself. Why am I bared to the blast in following Thy will and performing Thy command? Why are tears and strife my portion? Why am I wearied out and left desolate, though I am fighting the Lord's battle? That is the prophet's real complaint.

¶ Pain and sin, as we know them, cannot be dismissed by general considerations about the excellence of sympathy or moral victory; we must find real sympathy for all real suffering, real conquest of all real evil. Let us consider the lesser problem of Pain. If God is revealed in Christ the sympathy and the conquest are sure. God suffers, and God conquers. When we suffer, we share the experience of God. In all our afflictions He is afflicted, and all the pain is permitted for the joy that comes out of it, the joy of hearts united for ever in the bond that common suffering makes; and because our fellow-sufferer is God, we can believe that for all innocent pain there is the sympathy that redeems it. This is not proved, of course, but it is credible; it makes sense, and nothing else makes sense, of pain. It may be doubted whether suffering is altogether evil. It is apparently not only a condition of the realization of some forms of good, but also an essential part of much that is best in life—heroism and self-sacrifice.[1]

1. Jeremiah was *conscious of his own integrity.*—Of course, like all the other saints of God, he was poignantly aware of his own unworthiness. He must have had as deep a conviction of sinfulness as any of the great prophets and psalmists of Israel. None could have lived so close to God as he did without an overwhelming sense of uncleanness. What Job felt, and Moses, and David, and Isaiah, must have been constantly present to his consciousness also. But in respect to this special outburst of hatred, he knew of nothing for which to blame himself. He had not taken pleasure in the disasters he announced, or spoken in the

[1] W. Temple, in *Foundations*, 220.

heat of personal passion. The sins of the people had procured the evils he predicted; and he had only sought to warn the reckless mariners of the rocks that lay straight in their course.

2. Jeremiah was *perplexed at the inequality of human lot.*— Every word of Asaph's complaint in Psalm lxxiii. might have been appropriated by Jeremiah. He had never swerved from the narrow path of obedience; at all hazards he had dared to stand alone, bereft of the comforts and alleviations that come in the lot of men; he did not scruple to bare his heart toward God, knowing that to the limit of his light he had done His bidding. But he was hated, persecuted, threatened with death; whilst the way of the wicked prospered, and they were at ease who dealt very treacherously. Surely it was in vain that he had cleansed his heart and washed his hands in innocency. It was too painful for him. His feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped.

From the beginning this has been the crux of the problem of suffering. It was not hard to understand suffering where there was sin. The mystery was rather on the other side, that so often the wicked seemed to escape their just punishment. But that the righteous should suffer while the wicked went scot-free, this seemed a challenge of God's moral government, so staggering that for long—even in the face of the most convincing evidence—men refused to believe in the fact. We see this in the attitude of Job's friends, when they insist, in spite of Job's denial, that where there is so much suffering there must have been corresponding sin. We see it in the protest of Jeremiah and Ezekiel when they repudiate the old proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." And yet it remains true that the innocent do suffer with and for the guilty, and that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. What does it mean?

There are two things which it might mean. One is that the ultimate reality is force, and that the Christian faith in a loving Father, who cares for each one of His human children, is without foundation in fact. The other is that the individual is not the final unit; that, because God's plan is social, a family, and not simply a collection of unrelated sons and daughters, His method

of training must be more complex than would be the case if He were dealing with isolated individuals. It is the latter that is the Christian view. God's method is a method of redemptive love, and redemptive love saves by vicarious suffering.

¶ For people like me, who are confirmed invalids with no hope of recovery, this religious point of view [expiatory suffering] has the advantage of giving us strength and even joy in bearing the pain, the sleepless nights, and the thousand and one deprivations of our lot; and it further teaches us to see material pleasures in the right light, a process which makes them appear very hollow, and sometimes positively harmful. The reason why I am so happy is that I do not envy any one; I have found the secret of pure joy, for I suffer with Christ in the holy cause of the redemption of humanity. Then I have other sources of joy as well, which are more beautiful and fragrant than any of the ordinary pleasures of health, and which I would like every one to possess, even if it involved their being ill for years. Fortunately, however, this is not an indispensable condition for those who want to comfort and help all who are fallen and out of the way, and who would show them the radiant glories of eternity in the midst of the shadows of this earthly life.

Sometimes I feel that I am so much happier than those whom the world reckons the most fortunate, that I am almost ashamed of myself, and I am quite glad when from time to time my spirit fails me, and I realize my oneness in suffering with all who struggle and rebel. Oh, how well I understand them, when I think of all the blessings that I have received and how I have fallen! I feel then that I am sister to all these unhappy souls, and my heart goes out to them, and I long to take them by the hand and dry their tears, and show them Him who is the Saviour and the Life.[1]

3. But Jeremiah was not only troubled about himself, he was *anxious for God's character.*—There is a touch of apparent vindictiveness in his cry. "Let me see thy vengeance on them"; "pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter." We are disposed to contrast these words with those that Jesus breathed for His murderers from the cross, and those that Stephen uttered as the stones crashed in upon him; and we think that there is an alloy in the fine gold, a trace of dross in the saint.

[1] *A Living Witness: The Life of Adèle Kamm* (1914), 202.

It is possible to adopt the suggestion that the prophet was predicting the fate of these wicked men, or that he was the Divine mouthpiece in this solemn pronouncement of the coming doom. But a deeper and more correct conception of his words appears to be that he was concerned with the effect that would be produced on his people if Jehovah passed by the sin of his persecutors and intending murderers. It was as though the prophet feared lest his own undeserved sufferings might lead men to reason that wrongdoing was more likely to promote their prosperity than integrity and holiness.

Josiah was the one God-fearing monarch of his time, but he was slain in battle; he himself was the devoted servant of God, and his life was one long agony; was it the best policy then to fear God? Might it not be better to worship the gods of the surrounding peoples, who seemed well able to defend their votaries, and to promote the prosperity of the great kingdoms that maintained their temples? As Jeremiah beheld the blasting influence of sin, how the land mourned, and the herbs were withered, and the beasts and birds consumed, his heart misgave him. He saw no limit to the awful evil of his times, so long as God seemed indifferent to its prevalence. Therefore he cried for vengeance—not for the gratification of his own feeling, but for the sake of Israel and of God.

¶ Drummond's exposition of revelation, as also of evolution, needs to be supplemented by only one remark which, when he wrote his articles [on science and religion in the *Expositor* and the *Nineteenth Century*], it was not possible to make with confidence. Recent researches into the origins of the Old Testament have proved that the factor in the extraordinary development of moral and religious truth, which is so discernible in the history of Israel and in their gradual ascent to the loftiest heights of spiritual knowledge, from the low levels of life which they had once occupied with their Semitic neighbours, was the impression upon the people as a whole through the wonderful deeds of their history and the experience of their greatest minds, of the *character* of God. But to impress the character of God upon a people so sensitive and so responsive is revelation in its purest and most effective form.[1]

(1) At first men thought of God as outside the drama of

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Life of Henry Drummond*, 244.

history—the spectator, the playwright; if acting at all, only occasionally, at set times and for specific purposes, but not Himself involved in His inner life in the fortunes of the human actors He set in motion. This was, on the whole, the dominant Greek conception, and it recurs again and again in Christian history. God is the onlooker, sympathetic indeed, and well disposed, whose great calm we may hope to share in the good time coming when this life is over, and the other which lies beyond has begun.

(2) But the prevailing Christian conception is very different. It is not merely that God is in history, immanent as well as transcendent, actor as well as spectator, but that He is involved in His inmost life in the fortunes of the human participants. He not only acts, He cares. When Israel sins, the burden falls not on man only, but on God. He is like the husband whose wife has committed adultery, the father whose children have rebelled against him. If He punishes, it is not because He is indifferent or angry, but because He earnestly desires their moral good. There is no suffering of theirs in which He does not share. "In all their affliction he was afflicted; . . . in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

¶ It is no argument against the love of God that the world is a world of pain, provided, as we know to be the case, that God Himself has elected to suffer more than the greatest sufferer, and that there is a worthy end to it all.[1]

¶ The deeper these thoughts sank within me, the more complete became my dissatisfaction with the shallow theories through which human thinkers have striven to bridge over contradictions which God has left unreconciled, and to reply to questions which He has been pleased to leave unanswered. That death of anguish which Scripture declares to us to be "necessary," though it does not explain wherein its dire necessity resides, convinced me that God was not content to throw, as moralists and theologians can do so easily, the whole weight and accountability of sin and suffering upon man, but was willing, if this burden might not as yet be removed, to share it with His poor, finite, heavily burdened creature. When I looked upon my agonized and dying God, and turned from that world-appealing sight, Christ crucified for us, to look upon life's most perplexed and

[1] Bishop Brent.

sorrowful contradictions, I was not met as in intercourse with my fellow-men by the cold platitudes that fall so lightly from the lips of those whose hearts have never known one real pang, nor whose lives one crushing blow. I was not told that all things were ordered for the best, nor assured that the overwhelming disparities of life were but apparent, but I was met from the eyes and brow of Him who was indeed acquainted with grief, by a look of solemn recognition, such as may pass between friends who have endured between them some strange and secret sorrow, and are through it united in a bond that cannot be broken.[1]

Mist on the hills, all mist,
And never a hill-top kissed
With the fire of the hidden sun:
Mist in the leafy dells
And the open rolling fells,
And the work of the day is done.

Mist on the moaning sea,
Where the waves toil hopelessly
And the land is a shadowed death:
Mist on the river's breast,
And every branch is dressed
In the gauze of its clinging breath.

Mist in the mind of man,
However he try to scan
The track of the coming years:
Is there mist in the mind of God,
And never a footstep trod
But is wet with a rain of tears?[2]

II.

The Response.

1. There is no attempt at explanation. God never explains Himself in a ready-made fashion. God explains Himself through life. God explains Himself by deeds. The complaint is answered by a counter-complaint. Jeremiah's charge against God of injustice is met by God's charge against Jeremiah of weakness. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee,

[1] Dora Greenwell.

[2] D. H. S. Nicholson, *Poems*, 6.

then how canst thou contend with horses? and though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?"

The phrase "the pride," or "the swelling of Jordan" may mean either of two things, perhaps both. It may refer to the floods which follow the rainy season, when the river overflows its banks, or it may simply be an allusion to the wide tract of wild, marshy land along those banks with reeds and undergrowth, in which lurked dangerous beasts of prey. Thus we read in chapters xlix. and l.: "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan." Apparently the swelling of Jordan was a spot dangerous to travellers, and much dreaded in consequence. The thought of the text, therefore, is this: If you cannot race against men on foot without becoming exhausted, how can you expect to prevail when you have to race against horsemen? At home, and in time of peace, you may feel safe, but how will you behave when you have to breast Jordan in full flood, or fight for your life against the fierce and terrible creatures that prowl along its banks waiting for what they may devour? In other words, there come crises in life when all our moral reserves have to be summoned to enable us to hold our own against the forces of overwhelming evil. Well is it for us in that day if we are not found unprepared, but are equal to the demands of the dreadful occasion. History records that the man who first asked himself this question in the words of the text was able to answer it sublimely in the hour of trial.

¶ The Jordan is from 90 to 100 feet broad, a rapid, muddy water with a zigzag current. The depth varies from 3 feet at some fords to as much as 10 or 12. In the sixty-five miles the descent is 610 feet, or an average of 9 feet a mile—not a great fall, for the Spey, and the Dee from Balmoral to Aberdeen, both average about 14 feet a mile. But near the Lake of Galilee the fall is over 40 feet a mile, and this impetus given to a large volume of water, down a channel in which it cannot sprawl, and few rocks retard, induces a great rapidity of current. This has given the river its name: Jordan means the Down-comer. The swiftness is rendered more dangerous by the muddy bed and curious zigzag current which will easily sweep a man from the side into the centre of the stream. In April the waters rise to the wider bed, but for the most part of the year they keep to the

channel of 90 feet. Here, with infrequent interruptions of shingle, mostly silent and black in spite of its speed, but now and then breaking into praise and whitening into foam, Jordan scours along, muddy between banks of mud, careless of beauty, careless of life, intent only upon its own work, which for ages by the decree of the Almighty has been that of separation.

Down the broad valley [called a wilderness in the New Testament] there curves and twists a deeper, narrower bed—perhaps 150 feet deeper, and from 200 yards to a mile broad. Its banks are mostly of white marl, and within these it is packed with tamarisks and other semi-tropical trees and tangled bush. To those who look down from the hills along any great stretch of the valley, this Zôr, as it is called, trails and winds like an enormous green serpent, more forbidding in its rankness than any open water could be, however foul or broken. This jungle marks the Jordan's wider bed, the breadth to which the river rises when in flood. In the Old Testament it appears as the "Pride of Jordan," and always as a symbol of trouble and danger. "Though in a land of peace thou be secure, what wilt thou do in the Pride of Jordan? He shall come up like a lion from the Pride of Jordan." It was long supposed that this referred to the spring floods of the river, and it is given in the English version as "swelling," but the word means "pride," and as one text speaks of the "pride of Jordan being spoiled," the phrase most certainly refers to the jungle, whose green serpentine ribbon looks so rich from the hills above. In that case we ought to translate it the "luxuriance" or "rankness" of Jordan. Though lions have ceased from the land, this jungle is still a covert for wild beasts, and Jeremiah's contrast of it with a "land of peace" is even more suitable to a haunted jungle than to an inundation. But it is floods which have made the rankness, they fill this wider bed of Jordan every year; and the floor of the jungle is covered with deposits of mud and gravel, with dead weed, driftwood and the exposed roots of trees.[1]

2. Jeremiah needed to be braced. He is taught the need of endurance. It is a strange cure for cowardice, a strange remedy for weakness; yet it is effective. It gives stiffening to the soul. The tear-stained face is lifted up calm once more. A new resolution creeps into the eye to prove worthy of the new responsibility. God appeals to Jeremiah's strength, not to his weakness. "By God's grace I will fight, and fighting fall if need be. By

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 486, 484.

God's grace I will contend even with horses; and I will go to the pride of Jordan though the jungle growl and snarl." This was the result on Jeremiah, and it was the result required. Only a heroic soul could do the heroic work needed by Israel and by God, and it was the greatest heroism of all that was needed, the *heroism of endurance.*

¶ Nothing worth doing can be done in this world without something of that iron resolution. It is the spirit which never knows defeat, which cannot be worn out, which has taken its stand and refuses to move. This is the "patience" about which the Bible is full, not the sickly counterfeit which so often passes for patience, but the power to bear, to suffer, to sacrifice, to endure all things, to die, harder still sometimes to continue to live. The whole world teaches that patience. Life in her struggle with nature is lavish of her resources. She is willing to sacrifice anything for the bare maintenance of existence meanwhile. Inch by inch each advance has to be gained, fought for, paid for, kept. It is the lesson of all history also, both for the individual and for a body of men who have espoused any cause.[1]

¶ Would you grow a rose? Then the sun's rays must be broken up and buried out of sight to rise again in new beauty of form and shade. Obtain a rose in any other way, and it is no rose but an artificiality without life or fragrance. Even so does the revealing of the glory of God carry with it a cosmic calvary in which we, His children, are individually called to share. This is as truly the nature of things in their highest computation as it is true of the simplest modes in which beauty and truth express themselves in our experience.[2]

(1) *God puts first that which is less, and afterwards that which is greater.*—He does not put us at once to contend with horses, but tests us first with footmen. He does not allow any one of us with frail and fainting courage to meet the overflowing floods of Jordan; He causes us first to be tested in our homestead—the land of peace, where we are comparatively secure amidst those who know and love us. God graduates the trials of our life; He allows the lesser to precede the greater. He gives us the opportunity of learning to trust Him in slighter difficulties, that faith may become muscular and strong, and that we may be able to walk to Him amid the surge of the ocean. Be sure that whatever your sorrows and troubles are at this hour, God has allowed them

[1] Hugh Black, *Edinburgh Sermons*, 272. [2] R. J. Campbell.

to come to afford you an opportunity of preparation for future days.

¶ Man's condition in the world presents an insoluble problem except upon one hypothesis. For he cannot help believing that he exists for a purpose. Every instinct of his nature compels him so to do. And yet when he looks round him for evidence of that purpose he is everywhere baffled and perplexed. He has capacities for pleasure, but they conduct him to pain. He desires knowledge, but is limited to ignorance. And if he works for the improvement of his race, his work is hampered on every side, while he sees the men most qualified for usefulness continually cut off in their prime. Neither pleasure nor knowledge nor achievement, then, can be the destined end of man upon earth. And if there is no further alternative, his instincts deceive him, and he exists in vain. But once adopt the hypothesis that the world is a school of character, and everything falls into its place in the scheme. He has pleasure enough, and knowledge enough, and achievement enough, here to suggest what possibilities hereafter may await him; while the pain and doubt and frustration that hinder his present progress may be fashioning his character for future use.

> What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
> The most consummate of contrivances
> To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith.

Thus the only theory of the world which, as a rational hypothesis, seems tenable is the one that, on other grounds, the Christian believes to be true. And this coincidence of his belief with rational probability gives additional confidence to all his practice.[1]

(2) *Victory over the lesser will ensure victory over the greater.*— By the successful running with the footmen we shall be prepared for the severer contest with horses. Hence little trials borne well prophesy our bearing well such as may be greater, should God please to send them. And if, when entrusted with but a few things, we are found faithful in them, the Lord whom we serve is likely to make us "ruler over many things."

¶ It is not uncommon for men to believe that they are able to bear great calamities better than they can bear small ones. They lose all patience with an attack of toothache, yet fancy that they could smilingly endure leprosy or consumption; they lose their temper with the silly oversights of domestics and workpeople, but they are sure that a crushing misfortune would evoke their

[1] J. R. Illingworth, *Christian Character* (ed. 1904), 37.

heroism; they lose all dignity and peace of mind in dealing with the peddling mishaps of routine life, yet cherish the belief that they are prepared to take arms against a sea of troubles whenever it happens to break forth. It is a flattering unction we should refuse to lay to our soul. Wesley tells that one day sitting by the fire of a wealthy gentleman a puff of smoke came down the chimney, whereupon the host plaintively addressed the evangelist, "You see, sir, I have to put up daily with this kind of thing." Are we to believe that behind this fretfulness the man hid the strength of a martyr, and that whilst he was subdued by the smoke he could stand the fire? It is an illusion. He who is wearied in a sprint with the footmen will never contend successfully with horses; he who faints in the land of peace will make a poor show in the swelling of Jordan.[1]

3. Jeremiah was faithful in the peaceful retreat, and so did not fear the swelling of Jordan. He made straight for the lair of the lion. No one could have had an easier time than Jeremiah if he had done like the others—proclaimed peace when he knew there was no peace. It was by his own voluntary action that he passed from running with the footmen to contending with the horses and from the land of peace to the swelling of Jordan. He must go; for he wills to obey; the hand of the Lord directs him. It is his mission. It matters not what lies before him. He is one of those who must ignore everything but their duty, their mission, their message to the world. And though the earth close around him in balls of fire, still he must proceed. "Jeremiah, go not to Jerusalem! Pashhur the priest is there. There are enemies there powerful enough to take away thy life—or at any rate they will attempt it—and they will come very near doing so. They will make thy life a torture. Pashhur is there, thy great foe." One can hear in imagination Jeremiah saying as Luther said: If it rained Pashhurs nine days running I must go. What does it matter what it rains? If you are in the path of duty it matters not how the storms may come. The servant of duty

> Needs must pass the thunder's lair
> Where ambushed lightnings lie,
> Where meteors cleave the hissing air
> And perils throng which none may dare—
> Save those that seek the sky.

[1] W. L. Watkinson.

Jeremiah was actually bolder in the swelling of Jordan than he had been in the land of peace. When Jeremiah came to Jerusalem, his heart was set like flint, his aspect was grander and bolder than before. So logic was completely out of it. There is no logic in spiritual power, unless it has a separate logic of its own. This is all the logic of spiritual power, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles. They can do nothing of themselves; they can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth them. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." That is the logic of faith and spiritual power. You cannot pass from premise to conclusion, because you are dealing with an infinite quantity, and the amount of your power simply depends on the amount of your capacity to receive from God. Touch His infinite hand and you can do anything.

4. Jordan has got into poetry as the symbol of the passage to the better life. We speak of passing the stream of Jordan, meaning the stream of Death; just as we say "across the water," meaning that we leave our own sweet land for some far-off place of promise. Jordan was the little silver line which separated Canaan from the outer world; and the Jew, in his captivity, looked upon it as dividing him from the city of his passionate desire, while he dwelt in a city for which he had but scant liking. What wonder that Christian souls have called Death the Jordan, and spoken of their holy land as Canaan! To pass over Jordan has long been a proverb for dying, and the fields of Canaan flowing with milk and honey a sweet symbol of the Christian's place of rest.

It is a felicitous expression and gathers within itself all possible troubles, all life's tempests, and within its broad compass also points all too plainly to the final overwhelming catastrophe that soon or late rounds the whole; it is so intense with force, so human, "How wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?" And wise men always reckon on the possibility of flood. What will you do in the "rainy day," when no more money can be drawn from the bank? "Oh! I have insured against that." That is wise; and,

being wise, you have, of course, reckoned for the time when the golden bowl is broken, when no more life is to be drawn from the blood? "Yes, I have insured my life; they will be all right." *They!*—yes, but you?

¶ The river "Jordan" had no bridges, and, as far as we read, very few boats. It was never crossed by those means of man's invention—save only that ferryboat which once went to carry over king David's household. From this we may well take this simple lesson—that God may use, and does sometimes use, human art to bring His children safe through their troubles; but more often, He takes it into His own hand, and so lays the matter out as to give all the glory only to Himself. We are very fond to build our bridges, by which we are to walk over the waters; but we shall find at last that we were oftener carried through them.[1]

¶ It is written by one who knew the swellings of Jordan, that to the faithful the stream was shallow, whilst to the doubters it was deep; that the depth of the stream varied with him who crossed; as faith failed, the waters grew higher. Bunyan knew the stream, and in his book is written the true story of the swelling of Jordan: the trustful goes over almost dry-shod, but over him who is faint and faithless the waters gather.[2]

[1] J. Vaughan.

[2] G. Dawson, *Sermons on Daily Life and Duty*, 325.

Habit.

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HABIT.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.—Jer. xiii. 23.

THE people of Jerusalem were occasionally accustomed to see the dark-skinned Ethiopian, whether we suppose that these were true negroes from Southern Egypt or dark Arabs, and now and then leopards came up from the thickets on the Jordan, or from the hills of the southern wilderness about the Dead Sea. The black hue of the man and the dark spots that starred the skin of the fierce beast are fitting emblems of the evil that dyes and speckles the soul. Whether it wraps the whole character in black, or whether it only spots it here and there with tawny yellow, it is ineradicable; and a man can no more change his character once formed than a negro can cast his skin, or a leopard whiten out the spots on his hide.

When the words of the text were spoken, Coniah was still king over Jerusalem, and it was a kind of last appeal, sorrowful, plaintive, almost hopeless; for the people had so long turned away from God, had indeed sinned so deeply and for so many years, that sin appeared to be ingrained in them, and no more to be eradicated than the blackness of an African skin or the spots on a leopard's hide. Jeremiah, indeed, well knew in his heart that Judah would not return to Jehovah, and so with pathetic bitterness he exclaimed: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

¶ The spots of the leopard, though they have been acquired by imitation of its surroundings, have through long ages been so ingrained and fixed that they cannot be changed. The creature itself cannot alter or remove them by any effort; they are part of its very nature; and the pattern of its skin lasts throughout the whole life of the animal, and is communicated from parent to offspring. And so every sinner knows how very hard it is to change evil habits, to efface the stains of sin that have become dyed in the flesh. It is fatally easy to acquire what it is fatally

hard to get rid of. You get so accustomed to your sin that you never feel how sinful it is. You are so like your surroundings that you have no sense of contrast or shame. You are content with yourselves, and make no effort to become better. And even when your conscience is aroused and you see the evil and the misery of your sin, the effort to root it out is painful in the extreme.[1]

Here is a text on Habit. Let us consider—

I. The Acquisition of Habit.
II. The Power of Habit.
III. The Hallowing of Habit.
IV. The Change of Habit.

I.

The Acquisition of Habit.

It appears to be an involuntary principle of our nature that we should acquire a tendency to repeat whatever we do often. This disposition or tendency we call habit. It is the effect of custom influencing all we do; according to the old adage, "Use is second nature." And this tendency to repeat an action until it becomes habitual increases with each repetition, like the revolution of a wheel moving down an incline.

1. Habit may be conceived to arise in this way. When, in the process of time—of the day, or the week, or the month, or the year—the point comes round at which we have been thinking of anything, or have done anything, by the law of the association of ideas we think of it again, or do it again. For instance, when day dawns we awake. We get out of bed because we have done so at that time before. At a later hour we take breakfast, and go away to business, for the same reason; and so on through the day. When Sunday morning comes our thoughts turn to sacred things, and we make ready to go to the House of God, because we have always been accustomed to do that. As the New Year draws nigh our mind turns to friendliness, and we think of all the means by which we can let our friends know that we are thinking of them.

[1] H. Macmillan, *The Gate Beautiful*, 108.

Of course it may be by some other juncture of circumstances, and not by the revolution of time, that we are reminded of what has been done in the past; but the cycles of time, the narrower and the wider, have a very great deal to do with the formation of habit. If we have done a thing only once before, when the point of time comes round again at which we did it there will be a tendency to recall it and to do it again; but this tendency will of course be far stronger if we have done it often before. Frequency enters greatly into habit. The reason why, when Sunday morning comes, we think of church, is not because we have been there once, but because we have been there every Sunday of our lives. The more frequently anything has been done, the stronger is habit, and frequency acts on habit through something else. Frequency gives ease and swiftness to the doing of anything. We do easily and swiftly anything that we have done often. Even things which seemed impossible can not only be done, but be done with facility, if they have been done often.

2. Habits are the elements of character. The deeds we do ripen into habits, and these form the warp and woof of character. The single act does not make character. There is sometimes a protest in the soul against the act just done, and a purpose never to repeat it. The first smoke may make the youth sick, but it does not characterize him as a smoker. The first drink may make the head dizzy, but it does not entitle the drinker to be called a drunkard. It is the repetition of acts that forms habits; and the habits of a man give him his character. It is a curious thing that the word "habit" means a garment that you can throw off when you please, and also a way of living that may be so bound up with you that you cannot change it. It seems as if it were meant in this twofold sense to convey the great truth that the sin which at first you can lay aside with ease like a loose coat may by frequent indulgence take such a firm hold of you as to become part of your very life—as much part of yourself as the spots on the leopard's skin—and you may find it impossible to wrench yourself free from it. The wise man says in the Book of Proverbs, "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

¶ When someone on one occasion repeated to Wellington the

maxim that "Habit is second nature," his reply was "Second nature! It is ten times nature"—a sentiment very likely to be in the mind of a disciplinarian who had spent all his life getting men to obey the word of command, and to face death in circumstances in which natural instinct would lead them to flee away.[1]

¶ The power of exercising the will promptly, in obedience to the dictates of conscience, and thereby resisting the impulses of the lower nature, is of essential importance in moral discipline, and absolutely necessary for the development of character in its best forms. To acquire the habit of well-doing, to resist evil propensities, to fight against sensual desires, to overcome inborn selfishness, may require a long and persevering discipline; but when once the practice of duty is learnt, it becomes consolidated in habit, and thenceforward is comparatively easy.

The valiant good man is he who, by the resolute exercise of his freewill, has so disciplined himself as to have acquired the habit of virtue; as the bad man is he who, by allowing his freewill to remain inactive, and giving the bridle to his desires and passions, has acquired the habit of vice, by which he becomes, at last, bound as by chains of iron.[2]

II.

The Power of Habit.

1. Habit gains power by every repetition of an act. Human gifts and faculties have a power of expansion. They increase and multiply. For example, money attracts money, learning increases learning, joy brings joy. It is so with goodness: good habits lead us to acquire still better habits, while the poor fellow who has once earned a bad name, and who is shut out from the helps and privileges that ordinary men enjoy, will generally cultivate his evil propensities and strengthen only such habits as are bad.

Our several acts in life seem to be of little consequence in themselves, but they have all a terrible significance, for habit is just made up of little acts, and each one helps, and each one tells, and each succeeding act tells more and more. We know that if a stone is dropped from a height it falls so many feet—sixteen feet during the first second. The next second it does not fall the same number of feet, but has acquired increased speed, and

[1] J. Stalker.

[2] Samuel Smiles, *Character* (ed. 1874), 192.

falls four times the distance it did during the previous second, and each succeeding second the speed is greater and swifter. The earth has a stronger gravitating power over it, draws it more quickly down, and it acquires momentum and gathers increasing rapidity as it falls. That is precisely the case with sin. It moves slowly at the start; but when it has begun, it increases in force and speed and dashes down the steep incline with resistless might.

¶ In South Africa there is a curious plant known as a hook-thorn or grapple-plant, said to bear some resemblance to the cuttle-fish. The large flowers are of a lovely purple hue and spread themselves over the ground or hang in masses from the trees and shrubs. The long branches have sharp, barbed thorns, set in pairs throughout their length. When the petals fall off and the seed-vessels are developed and fully ripe, the two sides separate widely from each other and form an array of sharp-curved hooks. Woe to the traveller who ventures near at such a time! In one of the Kaffir wars with England, the English soldiers suffered terribly from this plant. While the Kaffir, unclothed and oily, escaped harm, the European was certain to be made and held a prisoner. If one hooked thorn caught a coat-sleeve the first movement at escape would bend the long slender branches and hook after hook would fix its point into the clothing. Struggling only multiplied the number of thorned enemies, and there was no way of escape except to stand still, cut off the clinging seed-vessels, and remove them one by one. Many a luckless soldier was run to death by a Kaffir's spear while thus trying to free himself. This is a vivid illustration of the dangerous power of evil habit, which through custom and long self-indulgence hooks into a man's very heart and holds him against his reason and against his will a prisoner even to his death.[1]

2. The power of habit steadily grows till it dominates the will. We cannot explain this phenomenon; the fact we know, and it is of vast importance that we should know it. A repetition of the same thoughts and actions is so apt to ensure their continuance that it is one of the most difficult things in the world to check this habitual operation of the mind, and give it a different direction from that in which it has been wont to flow. Even habits which relate to matters of indifference become inveterate, and are with great difficulty modified and overcome. Especially are they

[1] L. A. Banks, *The Sinner and his Friends*, 242.

obstinate when they are under the control of some prevailing disposition, and fall in with the natural inclination of the mind.

Even in the most indifferent matter, the most ordinary postures, movements, and actions, when once people have got into a way of practising them, it seems next to impossible to leave them off. We come to do things without being aware that we do them: and when our attention is drawn to them, we feel as if we could not leave them off. Such is the power of habit or custom, put into our minds and bodies by Almighty God that we might be tried whether we will make a good or a bad use of it. How fearful to think what a turn it too often takes! how exceedingly horrible to be aware of shameful, corrupting, deadly sins, in a man's own self or his neighbour, having come to be so habitual as to be committed without the sinner being aware of it; or, if he is aware, with the feeling that he cannot help it.

¶ The tyranny of evil habit is proverbial. The moralists compare it to a thread at the beginning, but as thread is twisted with thread, it becomes like a cable which can turn a ship. Or they compare it to a tree, which to begin with is only a twig that you can bend any way, but when the tree is fully grown, who can bend it? And apart altogether from such illustrations, it is appalling how little even the most strong and obvious motives can turn aside the course of habit.[1]

¶ I have seen a photograph of a group of undergraduates, among whom was the late Bishop Creighton, and next to whom stood a man of brilliant gifts, of great scholastic attainments, one who was thought to be about to take a great part in the world, and yet who died a billiard-marker in a low public-house near Wapping, a slave to drink and gambling. So it is, indeed, that sin grows and grows, the deadly cords of habit tighten and tighten, and the soul wanders further and further from God, until perhaps the man even boasts of the sin he has done, of the evil he has taught a boy, gloats over it, as Fagin gloating over the Artful Dodger. And ultimately, indeed, the habits become so formed that he does not even care to try to break them, and the stern decree sent forth in the vision of the Revelation comes true—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."[2]

3. One of the greatest dangers in the formation of evil habit is that the man who is drawn away into sin will not appreciate

[1] J. Stalker. [2] L. T. Dodd.

the deadly seriousness of his situation until the habit has become a most important factor in his whole scheme of life. Coleridge calls attention to the fact that centres or centrepieces of wood are put by builders under an arch of stone while it is in process of construction, till the keystone is put in. Just such is the use that we make of pleasure. The pleasure lasts, perhaps, till the habit is fully formed; but, that done, the structure may stand eternal. All the pleasure and fascination that appeared at first in the sin disappears, and only the vice-like grip of a wicked habit remains.

¶ A naturalist who has been travelling in South America tells how he was once walking in the forests of the Amazon River collecting bird-skins for mounting. He was threading a forest path, carrying in hand a gun loaded with very fine bird-shot, while his Indian guide followed, carrying a heavier gun charged with buckshot to use in case they should come upon a jaguar. A bird of brilliant plumage flew into a tree which overhung the path, and as he peered into the foliage trying to discern the bird he became aware of something swaying before his eyes and a flashing of prismatic colours producing on him something of the impression of a kaleidoscope. So unobtrusively had this thing come into view that it dawned only slowly on his mind, pre-occupied with the search for the bird, that the object so softly reaching toward him was the head and six feet of the neck and body of an enormous water-boa. From its mouth the forked tongue was shooting and vibrating, and changing lights were flashed from its eyes, bent upon the hunter. With his cocked gun in hand he did not think to use it or to run away, but stood gazing, literally spellbound, as the snake, slipping from the bough on which it lay, advanced its head toward him.

Suddenly he heard his guide shout from behind him. The snake's head drew back with an angry hiss as the Indian crowded past him, raising his gun to his shoulder as he did so, and with the loud crack! crack! of the two barrels he seized the hunter with both arms and rushed him away from the place. Then he saw the snake, which had dropped from the tree, writhing and twisting in the path—a monster twenty-eight feet long and of girth in proportion. Its head was shattered by the two charges of buckshot, but the convulsions of the body were enough to show the reptile's enormous strength and give an idea of how the naturalist would have fared if once it had thrown its coils around him. The boa would have done this in a few moments more if he had been left to himself. If the guide had not rushed to his

aid, he would have stood still fascinated, and never would have stirred to avoid his fate. The snake had hypnotized him beyond the power of resistance or retreat.[1]

III.

The Hallowing of Habit.

1. The soul has its habits, which it acquires, even as the body and the mind acquire theirs, by use and practice. The habit of living without God is one which may be learned by any of us if we will. It is one of the easiest of all habits to acquire. Unlike some other habits, it demands of us no exertion and no self-denial; rather it consists in the refusal and repudiation of both of these. We have only to live at our ease, without care and without effort, and the habit is formed, too often for ever. When it is fully formed, then comes the peace of death, of spiritual death; and the soul that let God alone is at last let alone by God.

¶ When you have for two or three days together forgotten your prayers, has it not become, even in that short time, more easy to neglect, more difficult to resume them? When you have left God out of sight in your daily life, when you have allowed yourself to think scorn of His commands, when you have become careless about your language, trifling if not profane in conversation, cold and contemptuous and resentful in your thoughts of others; when you have thus fallen into an unchristian and irreligious state of mind and life, how soon have you found this state become as it were natural to you; how much less, day by day, did the idea of living without God alarm you; how much more tranquil, if not peaceful, did conscience become as you departed further and further in heart from the living God![2]

¶ As you pass along the spacious nave of some ancient cathedral, and your eye rests upon the exquisite carving which adorns each arch and mullion and corbel, you might be disposed to think that so much art was no part of the original design, that what you saw and admired was the effect of skilful ornamentation, laid on, superimposed upon the original structure after the building was completed. But this is not so. In the best specimens of ecclesiastical architecture, every single piece of

[1] L. A. Banks, *The Sinner and his Friends*, 168.

[2] C. J. Vaughan, *Memorials of Harrow Sundays*, 220.

carving is wrought out of the solid stone; nothing is added or laid on. The building has grown in beauty as it grew in size and dignity, step by step, until it approached completion in fulfilment of the architect's design. Those highly decorated corbels, that lovely tracery in the windows, those richly ornamented capitals, festooned, perhaps, with vine or oak leaves and hanging in natural clusters of grapes or acorns, so perfect that you feel you could go and pluck them from the stony stems out of which they spring, and from which they are suspended—all this delicate carving is inwrought in the actual material of the building itself. It is so with character. It must not be a something laid on, but inwrought, worked up out of the material of circumstance and wrought into the texture of our lives. The thin veneer of culture, the artificial polish of good breeding and good manners, is no substitute for character.[1]

2. But there is another, an opposite, habit of soul—that of living to God, with God, and in God. That too is a habit, not formed so soon or so easily as the other, yet, like it, formed by a succession of acts, each easier than the last, and each making the next easier still. We must admit God into our life, and allow Him to shape and hallow our habits. There are two aspects of character, the Divine and the human; two determining influences at work, God and circumstance. In the lower aspect, character is the harvest of the years: a result of the amalgamated labours and trials, the conflicts and decisions, of this life, in which all the accumulated joys and sorrows, the hopes and regrets, of the past have registered their mark and left their impress upon the man. In the higher aspect, character proceeds from the touch of Divinity. It is the shaping of the human soul by the hand of God Himself.

There are thousands of people in the world with abilities that remain undeveloped, and talents that are wasted and thrown away. Poets, philosophers, architects, mathematicians, statesmen who are lost to the world through their genius never having been discovered; men whom circumstance has shunted from the path of fame and left to die in ignorance of powers which might otherwise have enriched mankind. The talent was there, latent in the mind, but it remained hidden and suppressed, waiting for education to draw it out. It is so with religion.

[1] V. R. Lennard, *Our Ideals*, 90.

The instincts of prayer and praise, of faith, hope, and love, are not dead, even where they remain passive and inoperative; they are hidden and suppressed in the case of every man who leads a godless life, buried deep down within the soul under the accumulated load of worldly cares and alien associations, but they are still alive, like seeds lying through the long winter, forgotten in the earth, waiting for the return of spring to woo them from their hiding-place.

3. We must resolutely draw out the good which is the opposite of the evil we are indulging. And by educating, by drawing out more and more, the desire after this good, the evil is more and more put to flight. Thus the way to overcome inattentiveness of the mind is not so much to fix our attention on the fault as to cultivate and educate its opposite, concentration of mind. So the unhappy custom of always seeing the failings in our neighbours is best met by cultivating the spirit of charity, by going with those people who are opposite to ourselves in this respect; by endeavouring to look at the world in a larger, kindlier, and more gracious spirit; so those who are slaves to fleshly lusts may gradually diminish the power of these things by occupying their minds with chaste thoughts and images, and reading books which foster the growth of a pure imagination; and those who have the miserable habit of grumbling at life, which you will generally find where there is most to be thankful for, can by educating the spirit of gratitude put this tendency to flight, which more than any other takes all the savour out of life, and turns its sweetest blessings into bitterest gall.

¶ Why should we think so dolorously of habit—this law of life? Like all God's swords of truth, it is two-edged, and turns both ways, working for good as much as for ill. It is a friendly ally that we find in this solemn law of habit, as it may also be an enemy.

Commonly, when men speak of habits, they have bad habits in their mind. As Professor James of Harvard says, in his *Talks on Psychology*: "They talk of the smoking-habit, and of the swearing-habit, and of the drinking-habit, but not of the abstention-habit, or the moderation-habit, or the courage-habit." After a certain output of deliberate effort and a period of practice, the vital virtues become second-nature; we acquire the instinct for self-denial, the prayer-habit, the Bible-reading-habit, the

purity-habit, the truth-habit, the habits of faith, and hope, and love. Our receptive and expansive nature waits ready to incorporate all such pieties and virtues in its fibre and spontaneous movement. It is specially at the early stage that we have to bend our wills and drill our natural proclivities and watch ourselves with sentinel alertness. Time after time it is much "against the grain" to keep up the good custom; but "the grain" will soon "grow to" the repeated demand, like the muscles of a child-acrobat, or the branches of a Japanese dwarf-tree. Every time we repeat the exercise in self-mastery or honour or devotion, by the law of *vis inertiae* in nature the power to keep on in the good way increases.[1]

IV.

Change of Habit.

Has Jeremiah uttered the whole truth? Can nothing be done if years of habit have bent our natures into one shape, and that shape is deformed? Are we helpless if character has already been made crooked and perverse by the continual warping of evil habit? Is there no hope that the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots?

1. It is next to impossible for a man who has arrived at mature age, with evil habits formed in early years, to turn his course; no consideration that you can put before him has sufficient power to break down the practice. He is as convinced as you can be of the mischief of the course he is pursuing; no one laments it more bitterly, and at times feels it more keenly, and no one is more ready to form resolutions to amend. But the language of the prophet is expressive of the case, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" There is an irresistible force in the cravings of that long-indulged temper or appetite, which the man, with all his good intentions, has not the energy to resist. There has been no inward change, no power at work beyond the mere human resolution; and the consequence is that the latter state often becomes worse than the first. Those who witness the process become more and more convinced that

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 129.

there never will be any material change in that man; and they are ready to adopt language fully as expressive as that of the text —that it is as easy for the leopard to change his spots as it is for that man, with all his convictions and all his efforts, to continue in well-doing.

2. But that which is impossible with men is possible with God. We cannot change the Ethiopian's skin or the leopard's spots; but God can. He who made the machinery of the mind can, when it is broken, fashion it anew, and restore it to its functions. It is possible to convert the soul which has long been accustomed to do evil; but such conversion is as much the work of God as the creation of the soul was at the beginning.

The heart which no assaults could storm yields to the voice of love and mercy; the will which offered an obstinate resistance to the exhortation to turn and repent is at length subdued: the offer of a free pardon for all that is past overcomes the resistance. Religion, then, in a changed heart becomes the main business of life. It begins to pervade the every-day occupations. The heart is filled with the knowledge and love of God; and the new affections expel the old from the long-usurped throne. A change comes over the perceptive faculties. Beauty and consistency are now discerned in God's plan of redemption. New fields of interest and occupation open out: a new world has been discovered, in which are seen things of greater moment than the politics or controversies of the day. And the wonder to a soul so enlightened is, how it could have been so exclusively set upon the things of earth, when the things that are spiritual were so close at hand, and, now that they are seen, afford such scope for the exercise of the highest faculties of the soul. It is thus, if we may so speak, that the Ethiopian does change his skin, and the leopard his spots; for God Himself undertakes to do that which with man is declared to be impossible.

¶ When I lay in darkness and blind night, when I was tossed hither and thither by the billows of the world, and wandered about with an uncertain and fluctuating course, according to my habits at that time I considered it as something difficult and hard that anyone could be born again, lay aside what he was before, and although his corporeal nature remained the same, could become in soul and disposition another man. "How," said I,

"can there be so great a transformation—that a man should all at once lay aside what is either innate from his very organization, or through habit has become a second nature? How should a man learn frugality who has been accustomed to luxuries? How should he who has been clothed in gold and purple condescend to simple attire? Intemperance must always, as heretofore, invite him with tenacious allurements, pride puff him up, anger influence him, ambition allure him, pleasure captivate him—thus I have often said to myself, For as I was entangled in many errors of my former life, and did not believe that I could be freed from them; so I complied with the vices that cleaved to me, and despairing of amendment, submitted to my evil inclinations, as if they belonged to my nature. But after the stain of my former life had been taken away by the aid of regenerating water, a pure and serene light was poured into the reconciled heart; when, through the Spirit received from heaven, the second birth transformed me into a new man—things formerly doubtful were confirmed in a wonderful manner—what before was closed, became open, and dark things were illuminated; power was given to perform what before seemed difficult, and what was thought impossible became possible."[1]

(1) When once we are linked to Christ, that union breaks the terrible chain that binds us to the past. "All died." The past is broken as much as if we were dead. It is broken by the great act of forgiveness. Sin holds men by making them feel as if what has been must be—an awful entail of evil. In Christ we die to former self. As by changing the centre of a circle you change the position of all its radii, so, by changing the affections and the desires of the heart, Christ roots out every wrong action and implants the germ of every virtuous deed. His solution is not reformation, but regeneration—not new resolves, but a new birth.

¶ Augustine in his *Confessions* wrote it as with his blood: "For this very thing I was sighing—bound as I was, not with another's irons, but by my own will. For of a froward will was a lust made; and a lust served became a custom; and a custom not resisted became necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together, a hard bondage held me enthralled."

Augustine's *Confessions* tell us of his penal chains, but they tell us also how these chains were broken; and the power that broke their links of iron was, in one word, Christ. This trans-

[1] Cyprian, *Epistola ad Donatum*, 3.

formation of a habit-bound slave of sin into a virtuous man of God is a moral miracle far more wonderful than any physical miracle recorded in the New Testament. When John Newton, the brutal swearing sailor, was changed into the saintly singer of such hymns as "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," the Ethiopian changed his skin, the leopard his spots, and one "accustomed to do evil" learnt to do good. And there are multitudes alive among men and beatified before God who have been emancipated from the grip of evil habit and made "new creatures in Christ." There is no cant about it, nor any fond fancy; it is as sure as nature's law itself.

That agnostic Positivist, the late Cotter Morison, gave away the most of his case against Christianity when he made the frank avowal: "Ardent love, gratitude and veneration for Christ, when kindled, are able to snap the chains of habit, and sometimes prevent their being welded together again." Explain it how you will—and better than staying to explain it is proving it by trial—the fact is certified that when Christ is sought and trusted with whole-hearted surrender, His Spirit works a moral revolution.[1]

(2) We are animated by a new motive. "The love of Christ constraineth." As is a man's love, so is his life. The mightiest revolution is to excite a new love, by which old loves and tastes are expelled. "A new affection" has "expulsive power," as the new sap rising in the springtime pushes off the lingering withered leaves. So union with Him meets the difficulty arising from inclination still hankering after evil. It lifts life into a higher level where the noxious creatures that were proper to the swamps cannot live. The new love gives a new and mighty motive for obedience.

¶ Obedience is the essential spirit of the Christian life. Christ's command to us, as to His first followers, is "Follow me." We do not know whither He will lead us. The future is veiled before our eyes. It is no part of our business to inquire into the consequences of our discipleship. That is in His hands. Having heard the imperative of the Highest in His call, our task is to follow His leading in the practical conduct of daily life, and for all the needs of the future to surrender our lives to Him in the great obedience of trust. Like the disciples of old, we follow behind Him on the road of life in the spirit of wonder. Sometimes He comes graciously near to us as a Friend; but at all times He is enthroned in our hearts as Lord and Master. "Ye call me

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 134.

Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am." That is His word. And the response for which He asks is a love that expresses itself in a life of obedience to His commands.[1]

(3) We are set in a new world which yet is old. All things are changed if we are changed. They are the same old things, but seen in a new light, used for new purposes, disclosing new relations and powers. Earth becomes a school and discipline for heaven. The world is different to a blind man when cured, or to a deaf one—there are new sights for the one, new sounds for the other.

¶ There is only one way in which the leopard can change his spots. It is by removing it to another locality where there are no trees, and no surroundings like those of its native place; and there it would gradually lose, in the course of a few generations, its protective spots, and become like the new circumstances. Fixed as the spots of the leopard may seem, there is no creature in reality more variable. The panther is a variety of the leopard, whose spots are different, because it inhabits different places; and the ounce is a kind of leopard which is found in cold and mountainous places, and therefore has a rougher fur, and its spots are not so sharply defined, and have a tendency to form stripes, while the general colour is paler. The American leopard or jaguar has got bold black streaks on its breast, and larger spots on its body, with a small mark in the middle of them; while the puma or American lion, which is only a kind of leopard, has a uniform light tawny tint. And the remarkable thing is that the young puma displays a gradual change of fur like the lion cub; its coat being at first marked by dark streaks and spots, which fade away into the uniform tawny hue when the animal increases in size. Thus you see that the spots of the leopard change with its changing circumstances.

And this was the way in which God endeavoured to cure the evil habits of His own people. All reforms had been on the surface only; the evil was too deep-seated to be removed by temporary repentance. So long as they remained in the place where they were accustomed to do evil they could not learn to do well. But away from the idolatrous associations with which their native land had become tainted, a new life of truth and holiness was possible to them. God therefore allowed them to be carried captive to Babylon; and there in new circumstances they were to re-learn the forgotten lessons of faith and righteousness.[2]

[1] S. M. Berry, *Graces of the Christian Character*, 54.

[2] H. Macmillan, *The Gate Beautiful*, 110.

The Marred Vessel.

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The Marred Vessel.

And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.—Jer. xviii. 4.

The whole process of pottery as it was practised by the Israelites is represented on wall paintings still in existence. The clay was dug from the field, and then trodden by the feet of labourers until it became a workable paste, ready for the hand of the potter. His implements were few and simple. A disc of stone or wood rested upon a point fixed into a larger disc below, and upon it the clay was placed, and while the disc was whirled rapidly, the potter shaped the vessel with his hands. He wrought the work upon the wheels until it was complete; then it was smoothed, coated with a glaze, and burned in a furnace. And it is remarkable that pottery thus simply and swiftly made was so durable that fragments of it are the only signs left of many once flourishing cities, sole witnesses to life and industry long since passed away. The trade, which the Israelites had learned in Egypt, was common among them. Culinary vessels, jars for the safe keeping of parchments, tiles of all sorts were made in vast numbers. Indeed, in the Book of Chronicles we read that there was a royal pottery establishment, and it was either the site of that old factory, or else the place where fragments or potsherds from it were cast away, that is referred to both in the Old and in the New Testament as the Potter's Field. To this well-known pottery Jeremiah was sent, not to preach a sermon, but to prepare one—a reminder to us that ordinary scenes and secular work may be eloquent with Divine teaching to any whose hearts are ready to receive it. Indeed, there is no sphere of activity anywhere about which God cannot say to His servant as He said to this prophet, "There I will cause thee to hear my words."

¶ A few years ago I had the privilege of closely observing an

Eastern potter as he was seated at his work. When I began to watch him his wheel was at rest, for he was in the act of preparing the clay for the moulding, kneading it just as a woman kneads dough. When satisfied that it was just right for his purpose, he took up a short stick, placed it in the junction of one of the spokes on the inner side of the rim, and then with some six or eight vigorous turns he set the wheel a-spinning swiftly. Then he lifted the shapeless mass of clay, placed it in the very centre of the wheel, by doing which, of course, he caused it to revolve with great rapidity. He then smoothed the clay and fashioned it with both hands, till it looked just like a low cone; and then he thrust the thumb of his right hand down through the top of the cone to the centre, carefully widening the hole so as to give the sides the requisite thinness; and thus with wonderful dexterity, and in a surprisingly short space of time, he fashioned a beautiful vase. So far as one could judge from the mere observer's point of view, that vase was perfect, but I noticed that time after time his fingers returned to it in the endeavour to do something that had not been effected. His practised, keen eye and his delicate touch informed him that there was a flaw, a defect, of which those who were round him were wholly ignorant; and much to the surprise of us all who stood around him, he, after one moment's pause and careful scrutiny, crushed that vase into a shapeless lump of clay again, began to remodel it, and produced an entirely different vessel. As I stood there and saw it all, this incident recorded in the Book of Jeremiah was vividly recalled to my mind. There before me was a living commentary on this particular section of Scripture, and the whole scene was well calculated to impress the spiritual truth more deeply on one's memory and heart.[1]

Let us note—

I. The Original Design of the Potter.
II. The Marring of the Vessel.
III. The Final Result.

I.

The Original Design.

1. The text clearly teaches that God has a plan for every life, a pattern for every character, an ideal for every soul. God is the Almighty Potter; and, in one sense, we are but clay in His hands.

[1] J. M. Munro, in *The Christian World Pulpit*, lxxviii. 381.

There is some definite, desirable, and beautiful ideal which God wishes us to realize. All men's lives are in God's hands. In Isaiah xlv. 5, God says of Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." This is striking language. It is as if God had said, "I placed on thee the military belt, and prepared thee for war and conquest." Men who are strangers to God are often employed by God to accomplish His providential plans. Thus He raised up Cyrus on account of the Hebrew people. In a sense, Cyrus was the Lord's anointed, as we learn from the first verse of this same chapter. This does not mean that Cyrus was a worshipper of the true God; but it means that God had set him apart to perform a most important public service. The title here given to Cyrus is one of appointment to office rather than one expressive of holiness of character. He was God's instrument in the accomplishment of His vast designs among the nations. All nations and kings are in God's hand. In this sense He called Nebuchadnezzar His servant, the staff of His indignation, and the rod of His anger. God "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings. He makes the wrath of men to praise Him and the remainder of wrath He restrains.

¶ There seems to lie in all men, in proportion to the strength of their understanding, a conviction that there is in all human things a real order and purpose, notwithstanding the chaos in which at times they seem to be involved. Suffering scattered blindly without remedial purpose or retributive propriety—good and evil distributed with the most absolute disregard of moral merit or demerit—enormous crimes perpetrated with impunity, or vengeance when it comes falling not on the guilty, but the innocent—

> Desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimmed in jollity—

these phenomena present, generation after generation, the same perplexing and even maddening features; and without an illogical but none the less a positive certainty that things are not as they seem—that, in spite of appearance, there is justice at the heart of them, and that, in the working out of the vast drama, justice will assert somehow and somewhere its sovereign right and power, the better sort of persons would find existence altogether unen-

durable. This is what the Greeks meant by the Ἀνάγκη or destiny, which at the bottom is no other than moral Providence.[1]

2. This implies the living presence of the Potter in this world which is being moulded. It involves the constant, direct impact, if one may so speak, of the Divine fingers. That is one part of St. Paul's great argument in the Epistle to the Romans. The Israelites thought that God had selected them and wound them up like a clock, so that they were to go on and on without further change for ever. St. Paul says No. God has not taken His fingers from the work. He never bound Himself to have mercy on you and on no one else. "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy." And if you do not answer His purpose, He will change matters with you. And so, according to the picture before us, God is ever actively present, and what we call secondary laws are figments of the imagination, phrases that speak out our ignorance, the sign of the veil upon our eyes. We so speak because we cannot see the great Hand at work, touching every individual thing, allowing nothing, whether law or anything else, to intervene between His living purpose and the world that is being moulded by Him. If God is indeed thus moulding the world, secondary laws in any real sense are out of the question. When you start the world like a clock, as some scientists suppose, and then leave it going by its own machinery, all moulding is over, all purpose beyond that point has vanished, all progression has disappeared. You have nothing but a monotonous mechanism that goes on without progress until the wheel runs down. But in the picture of the potter God's presence here is a living presence. He has the clay in His hand; He has moulded it, and is shaping it on His wheel.

¶ No one has shown more lucidly than Dr. Martineau has that in all our Ideals there is revealed a Divine Presence which, though felt in us, is also felt to be not *of* us, so that we can clearly distinguish between this self-revelation of the immanent God, which carries with it the sense of an *objective* reality, and those *subjective* desires, affections, and sympathies which pertain to us as separate individuals. But though the Divine Ideal is ever more or less vividly present in our consciousness, and is that which gives to our life all its highest features, and all its truest

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies*, ii. 8.

charms and blessedness, yet it first distinctly reveals itself and its authority when it *resists* and *condemns* our personal desires and aims. Now it is this aspect of the Ideal as opposing us, commanding us, obliging us, which is the characteristic feature of our *ethical* consciousness; and it is this experience which is a continual warning to us against falling into the paralysing fallacy of supposing that our lives are nothing more than transient modes or phases of God's eternal life. Here it is we learn our true individuality, and learn also, what Kant so clearly saw, the quite infinite value of a "Good Will."[1]

3. The pattern which it is possible for any man to reach may be, indeed must be, different for each. There was one ideal possible for Egypt, another for Assyria, and another for Babylon, with their respective privileges and opportunities, and quite another for Israel, with its pre-eminent advantages. These other nations were not required to be everything that the Jewish people ought to have become. God is not unrighteous to demand equal attainments from unequal gifts. He gives to one five talents, to another two, and to another one; but He does not look at last for ten from each of them. And what is true thus of nations is true also of individuals. God has one ideal for those who, like ourselves, are favoured to the full with gospel blessings, and another for such as have not our advantages. But there is a possible result that shall be worthy of His approval for each; and that each may attain to it has been His original and primary design in their creation. The ideal is not the same for all, but it is in each appropriate to and in correspondence with the environment in which he is placed.

¶ The one secret of life and development is not to desire and plan, but to fall in with the forces at work—to do every moment's duty aright—that being the part in the process allotted to us; and let come—not what will, for there is no such thing—but what the eternal Thought wills for each of us, has intended for each of us from the first. If men would but believe that they are in process of creation, and consent to be made—let the maker handle them as the potter his clay, yielding themselves in respondent motion and submissive hopeful action with the turning of the wheel, they would ere long find themselves able to welcome every pressure of that hand upon them, even when it was felt in pain,

[1] *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, ii. 473.

and sometimes not only to believe but to recognize the Divine end in view, the bringing of a son into glory.[1]

4. There are two things to be remembered with respect to this moulding of our individual life by God. One is, that God always moulds our life with a view to righteousness. That is the one undeviating Divine aim. God is righteous. "Can there be unrighteousness with God? God forbid!" Then every touch of the Divine finger must be a touch on behalf of righteousness. Every imprint on the clay must stamp the eternal righteousness on it, and must make for righteousness. Another thing to be remembered is, that because God moulds for the sake of righteousness, He moulds first and chiefly intelligent creatures, with mind and thought and moral purpose and will of their own. So we are led on from step to step; and here is where the great perplexity, the great wonder, comes in, though, after all, a good deal of perplexity is created by our thinking that our minds ought to be large enough to comprehend the infinite nature of God. We cannot get our way except with puppets that will not move unless we touch them. But God will get His way in a grander fashion, not with puppets, but with men, with creatures that can resist His will, with creatures that have something of the God stamped on their own lives, with creatures that shall stand as gods in the glory of the eternal Presence.

¶ In a letter to Mr. Watts Russell, regarding the scheme for the transfer of the oratory of St. Philip Neri from Birmingham to Cheshire, Faber writes, "God's will is the one thing; it seems to magnify its own sweetness the longer and the more lovingly we adore it; one is fit to burst out into raptures of venturesome congratulation of God that His will is so all-strong, and we so base and vile; and to wonder that He has not *crushed* us in the path of some great providence instead of making such as we are a part and parcel of His overwhelming, onward-bearing will."[2]

Thou, Thou art the Potter, and we are the Clay,
And morning and even, and day after day,
Thou turnest Thy wheel, and our substance is wrought,
Into form of Thy will, into shape of Thy thought.

[1] George MacDonald.

[2] *The Life and Letters of Frederick William Faber*, 265.

Should Clay to the Potter make answer and say,
"Now what dost Thou fashion?" Thy hand would not stay:
Untiring, resistless, without any sound,
True, true to its Master, the wheel would go round.

How plastic are we as we live in Thy hands!
Who, who as the Potter the Clay understands?
Thy ways are a wonder, but oft, as a spark,
Some hint of Thy meaning shines out in the dark.

What portion is this for the sensitive Clay!
To be beaten and moulded from day unto day;
To answer not, question not, just to be still,
And know Thou art shaping us unto Thy will.

This, this may we plead with Thee, Workman Divine—
Press deep in our substance some symbol of Thine,
Thy name or Thy image, and let it be shown
That Thou wilt acknowledge the work as Thine own.

II.

The Marring.

1. The raw material with which the potter works is clay. This is the stuff of which each vessel, no matter what its shape may be, is composed. There resides in it the promise of becoming an object of usefulness or of beauty, once it has been subjected to the process of manufacture. Our lives possess a similar capacity. There are possibilities in us that admit of being realized. Out of the undeveloped material, which the fact of our existence in time represents, there can be produced forms and modes of personality of the most diverse kinds. Like the clay, we yield to treatment. Our natures are plastic. Powers of body and mind and will, abilities of a physical, an intellectual, and a moral order, manifest themselves. Character expresses itself, and more and more tends to stereotype itself on settled lines, and to harden into a permanent shape. Whereas in the early period there was little by which to distinguish one life from another; in the later, peculiarities assert themselves, differences are conspicuous. We display our individuality not only by the features of our face, our height,

our speech, our manner of walking, but in a multitude of characteristic ways, definable in some cases, but in others too subtle to be explained in words.

¶ I have been spending the week's end with a friend in Sussex. On Sunday morning we strolled upon the downs—ascending many miles to a stretch of pasture where, losing sight of the sea, we had nothing but the zenith above us and the wide veldt below. There we lay upon the grass, where Proserpina had evidently been before us, for it was bright with flowers; the summer air was soft, and flooded with golden light, and there was no sound except the singing of a lark at an immeasurable height. Suddenly the line against the sky formed by the brow of the hill was broken with moving shapes, and almost before we could spring to our feet we were surrounded by a countless flock of sheep. On they came, like Dante's lost souls in the Divine Comedy. To me they seemed all alike, but the shepherd told us that he knew every one of them, as a schoolmaster knows his scholars. My friend and I exchanged thoughts. He was a landscape painter, and our conversation fell on the limitations of our vision. We found that a traveller—we were both travellers—in a strange country is quick to discern the difference between race and race; but slow to discern the difference between face and face in the same race. To an Englishman, visiting for the first time a plantation in the Southern States, the negroes are black—that is all. To the African in London, we are—white. To both of us all pigtails are alike. The subtler differences of form and expression, by which we discriminate character and disposition, and which we count beautiful or ugly, have to be learned like a new language.[1]

2. Clay and human life are alike subject to effects being produced on them by a cause outside themselves. We know this about ourselves, that our lives do not consist of a series of experiences which we determine beforehand. We have not the choosing of our future, any more than we had of our past or of our present, in all the circumstances of it. The orbit of our career does not follow the path traced by our preconceptions and wishes. Things happen to us—bringing unexpected joys, or unlooked-for sorrows. Events take place, in whose initiation and accomplishment we had no part. We are indeed often denied even the opportunity of foreseeing them and preparing for them. They occur without any premonition. Perhaps we are apt to forget this fact about the

[1] Sir Wyke Bayliss, *Olives*, 137.

circumstances of our lives. Incidents of an ordinary kind, while they befall us in the character of unanticipated happenings, are not sufficiently unfamiliar to remind us of it. But when any great event takes place—any event, that is to say, which is fraught with serious consequences to us and ours, and which transforms our whole outlook; when God asserts His power in our life either in His providence or in His grace—then we realize that, in a true sense, we are clay.

¶ The evening exercise, on the question anent the providence of God, was sweet to me; and in converse after it, it was a pleasure to think and speak of the saints' grounds of encouragement from that head under trouble; particularly, how 'tis their God that guides the world; and nothing do they meet with but what comes thro' their Lord's fingers; how He weighs their troubles to the least grain, that no more falls to their share than they need; and how they have a covenant-right to chastisements, to the Lord's dealing with them as with sons to be rightly educated, not as servants whom the master will not strike but put away at the term.[1]

3. This clay failed to answer to the potter's design. "The vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter." Why was it marred? There was no lack of skill; no, but there was some gritty substance there, some stubborn resisting quality that would not yield to the deftness of the potter's hand. Human nature is often resistant, rather than pliable, to God's touch. Our wills conflict with His. Our way winds and bends like the flow of a river, when it should be straight as an arrow. An evil disposition in our nature mars the vessel in the hands of the Potter. The child must be docile if it is to learn, and we yielding if we are to profit.

We recognize at once that there is a great difference, almost an infinite difference, between us and a lump of clay. That is passive, powerless, helpless in the hands of the potter. It has no power of will, no liberty of choice, no possibility of decision. We are not clay. We were made in the image of God. We have some likeness to God. His image is defaced, but not effaced. It is our glorious, but also our terrible, prerogative that we are endowed with the power of choice. We can oppose the Divine Potter. We may joyously submit to God, or we may wickedly

[1] Thomas Boston, *A General Account of My Life*, 107.

oppose God. Weak and wicked men may say, "No," to the mighty and holy God.

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed. . . .

Look not thou down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow!
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's wheel?

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife,
Bound dizzily, mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings pass the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same![1]

[1] Browning, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

III.

The Final Result.

1. The potter does not fling away the marred vessel, but he breaks it and puts it on the wheel again and reshapes it. The potter's skill is not to be baffled. He wants to give his ideal reality. And he will shape and break, shape and break again, till the clay has taken the form he wishes. Jeremiah saw what that meant for the Israelites as a nation. It meant the breaking of their nation, their land left desolate, submission to the iron rule of Babylon. *That* was the breaking of Israel. But the prophet saw that God would still hold them, and by sterner discipline, by harder blows and hotter fires, would mould them to the use and form He wanted. That was the answer to Jeremiah's question, What can God do with this perverse nation? Break it and reshape it.

The patience and persistence of God with man is the truth which this sets forth. God will not easily let man go. He stands over mankind and over every individual soul with boundless patience. The gifts and calling of God, says St. Paul, are without repentance, without recall or change.

"So he made it again." That is surely very wonderful when we remember that the parable applied first of all to a nation that had deliberately defied its Maker and refused His counsel; but the prophecy was actually fulfilled in the wonderful national revival under the Maccabees, and will yet have its final fulfilment in that glorious day when Israel shall "blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." And as with nations, so also is it with individuals. He can remake us. Our dead selves may become stepping-stones to higher things. He who transformed Simon into an apostle can transform our lives, if we permit it, into vessels meet for His own use.

¶ It is reported of Wedgwood that he was trying to make an imitation of the Portland Vase in the form of jasper ware. In the soft clay the vases were done to perfection, but when they came out of the oven they were spoiled. This went on for six months. Then one of the workmen said to Wedgwood in despair, "Master, we have drawn the oven again and we

haven't got a single good vase." The master's reply was, "Well, you have had your wages, haven't you? *Go on.*" They did go on, and shortly after they succeeded, and the celebrated vase was produced. So God persists till His purpose is achieved.[1]

2. "He made it again another vessel." The potter could not make what he might have wished; but he did his best with his materials. So God is ever trying to do His best for us. If we refuse the best, He gives the next best. If we will not be gold, we may be silver; and if not silver, there are still the clay and the wood. How often He has to make us again! He made Jacob again, when He met him at the Jabbok ford, finding him a supplanter and a cheat, but after a long wrestle leaving him a prince with God. He made Simon again, on the resurrection morning, when He found him somewhere near the open grave, the son of a dove—for so his old name Bar-Jonah signifies—and left him Peter, the man of the rock, the Apostle of Pentecost. He made Mark again, between his impulsive leaving of Paul and Barnabas, as though frightened by the first touch of sea-sickness, and the times when Peter spoke of him as his son, and Paul from the Mamertine prison described him as being profitable.

The marred life will never again be what it might have been and what it ought to have been. It is said with deepest reverence that even God Himself cannot fully restore a marred life. It is sometimes supposed that God's grace is peculiarly manifested when a great sinner is saved, when a man is lifted from the gutter and placed among God's redeemed children. God's grace is vastly more honoured when boys and girls are converted to Christ in their sweet child[illegible]od, before they have gone down into the awful depths of s[illegible] It is ten thousand pities that the potter's vessel was ever marred; it is ten thousand pities that men should ever know the degradation of sin by a personal experience. How much sweeter, cleaner, purer, and diviner their lives, had they never served sin and Satan. But it is better that a life should be saved though marred than that it should be utterly lost. God will not throw your marred life away if you bring it to Him to be mended. You may have failed

[1] F. B. Cowl.

to realize your noblest possibilities and your highest ideals; you may have added failure to failure in your struggles toward noble attainment; nevertheless, you may bring your marred life as it is to God to be restored. He is waiting to be gracious; He desires to give you another chance.

¶ *Broken Earthenware* is the title of Mr. Harold Begbie's book in which he gives some account of the saving work of the Salvation Army in a particular district of West London, and by "Broken Earthenware" he means the broken human lives which have been mended and sanctified, and made meet for the Master's use by the work of our friends of the Salvation Army. The book is full of interest to the philosopher and the psychologist, because it furnishes abundant evidences of that possibility of conversion in human life and character which modern psychology is ready to allow. But it is of still more interest to the Christian, the Christian who believes that the whole purpose of religion is to save the lost and to make the bad good. In that comparison of Christianity with other religions of the world, which is now conducted with such thoroughness that it ranks as a science, the most striking thing, perhaps, that is brought out is that Christianity is alone among the religions of the world in even entertaining the thought, and much more in accomplishing the fact, of making bad men good.[1]

¶ Last summer, at one of the great Chautauqua Assemblies, I had the opportunity of hearing Mr. Bilhorn, the famous evangelist singer. One of his most effective solos is Butterworth's little poem, entitled, "The Bird with a Broken Wing." The bird with a broken wing was found in a woodland meadow; it received tender care and made progress toward complete restoration. But the wound was still there, and its sad effects never could be forgotten, nor could they be obliterated. Thus Mr. Bilhorn sang:

I healed its wound, and each morning
It sang its sweet old strain;
But the bird with the broken pinion
Never soared as high again.

Then the song told of a broken life and its second chance:

I found a young life, broken
By sin's seductive art;
And, touched with a childlike pity,
I took him to my heart.

[1] R. F. Horton.

He lived with a noble purpose,
And struggled not in vain;
But the life that sin had stricken
Never soared as high again.

But the bird with a broken pinion
Kept another from the snare;
And the life that sin hath stricken
Raised another from despair.

. . . . . .

But the soul that comes to Jesus
Is saved from every sin,
And the heart that fully trusts Him
Shall a crown of glory win.

Then come to the dear Redeemer,
He'll cleanse you from every stain;
By His wonderful love and mercy
You shall surely rise again.[1]

3. When the clay has received its final shape from the potter's hands, it must be baked in the kiln, to keep it; and even then its discipline is not complete, for whatever colours are laid on must be rendered permanent by fire. It is said that what is to become gold in the finished article is a smudge of dark liquid before the fire is applied; and that the first two or three applications of heat obliterate all trace of colour, which has to be again and again renewed. So in God's dealings with His people. The moulding Hand has no sooner finished its work than it plunges the clay into the fiery trial of pain or temptation. But let patience have her perfect work. Be still and know that He is God. Thou shalt be compensated when the Master counts thee fair and meet for His use.

¶ Canon Wilberforce told me that he had his likeness painted by the great artist Herkomer, who told him the following story: Herkomer was born in the Black Forest, his father a simple wood-chopper. When the artist rose to name and fame in London, and built his studio at Bushey, his first thought was to have the old man come and spend the rest of his years with him. He came, and was very fond of moulding clay. All day he made things out

[1] R. S. MacArthur, *Quick Truths in Quaint Texts*, ii. 215.

of clay, but as the years passed he thought his hand would lose its cunning. He often went upstairs at night to his room with the sad heart of an old man who thinks his best days are gone by. Herkomer's quick eye of love detected this, and when his father was safe asleep his gifted son would come downstairs and take in hand the pieces of clay which his old father had left, with the evidences of defect and failure; and with his own wonderful touch he would make them as fair as they could be made by human hand. When the old man came down in the morning, and took up the work he had left all spoiled the night before, and held it up before the light, he would say, rubbing his hands: "I can do it as well as ever I did." Is not that just what God Almighty is going to do with you? You are bearing the marks of failure just because you have been resisting Him and fighting Him. But, ah! my Lord comes with those pierced hands, and says: "Will you not yield to Me? Only yield, and I will make you again."[1]

4. There is a point when discipline ends, and God takes a man as he is, not for probation but for judgment. When, or where, that point is reached we dare not say of others, seeing we scarcely know it of ourselves. But always we must keep it in view as a dread possibility which may be nearer to us than we think. Now, if under any circumstances it is conceivable that final failure should be the result—what then of the Divine sovereignty? Perhaps we are too sensitive in this connexion. God is great enough to fail. He has failed in the past; He is failing every day. He cannot escape the risk of failure so long as He has to deal with free intelligences in a state of probation. No passage in Scripture is so pathetic as that which records our Lord's final departure from the Temple courts. How often had He come there, as boy and man, to worship and to work. How often had He looked into the wistful faces of the men and women that thronged past Him, and thought of the weary hearts that lay behind, and would have gathered them, but they would not. Now, His work is done; He will go His way and leave them to themselves. Slowly the sun sets; the evening lights linger on the Temple towers; the solemn hush of twilight falls over the busy city, as He moves away into the deepening gloom, into the shadow of the cross. "I would, and ye would not." It was

[1] F. B. Meyer, *The Soul's Ascent*, 29.

the greatest failure in history; but we know what came of it. For it was Love that failed; and Love's failures are Life's triumphs.

¶ He who staggers striving after the ideal life, even though he fail, is not himself utterly lost to good and God; that striving spirit is still an asset in the All-wise Eye. "It's of no use," say some after their early failures; "I must dree my ain weird and play out the game as it has begun." But it *is* of use. Many a man of good standing to-day was braced by his failures when outward-bound; many a man successfully "pulled himself together," and, like Jacob the errant, became, after his sifting discipline, a prince and power. Avert your ear from the demon-critic who would nip your better mind, and bind yourself by all the domestic and religious ties available to the things that save and make a man. Believe greatly, and life and God will answer to your faith and hope. Accept and openly wear the ring of discipleship that wards off temptation and keeps you safely heart-bound.[1]

Why hast Thou made me so,
My Maker? I would know
Wherefore Thou gav'st me such a mournful dower;—
Toil that is oft in vain,
Knowledge that deepens pain,
And longing to be pure, without the power?

"Shall the thing formed aspire
The purpose to require
Of him who formed it?" Make not answer thus!
Beyond the Potter's wheel
There lieth an appeal
To Him who breathed the breath of life in us.

I know we are but clay,
Thus moulded to display
His wisdom and His power who rolls the years;
Whose wheel is Heaven and earth;—
Its motion, death and birth;—
Is Potter, then, the name that most endears?

I grudge not, Lord, to be
Of meanest use to Thee;—
Make me a trough for swine if so Thou wilt;—

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 47.

But if my vessel's clay
Be marred and thrown away
Before it takes its form, is mine the guilt?

I trust Thee to the end,
Creator, Saviour, Friend,
Whatever name Thou deignest that we call.
Art Thou not good and just?
I wait, and watch, and trust
That Love is still the holiest name of all.

I watch and strive all night;
And when the morning's light
Shines on the path I travelled here below;—
When day eternal breaks,
And life immortal wakes,
Then shalt Thou tell me why Thou mad'st me so.[1]

[1] J. J. Murphy, *Sonnets and other Poems.*

The Lord our Righteousness.

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THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgement and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness.—Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

WHEN this prophecy was uttered, Judah was ten years from her fall. The good Josiah was in his grave—slain by the archers of Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt. Jehoahaz, his son, after three months' reign as successor, had been deposed. Jehoiakim, his brother, after acting as sovereign for eleven years, was a captive in Babylon. Jehoiachin, after three months of inglorious rule, was, like his father, carried off into exile. And now Zedekiah, his father's brother, occupied the throne. Still things in Judah went from bad to worse. Judah was on the down grade. "There was no remedy," "no healing more." Like a boat that has crossed the death-line on Niagara, Judah was in the rapids and hurrying to the brink of the fatal precipice. Its sun was going down in blood and darkness. Its day of grace was expiring. The thunder-clouds and lightning shafts of judgment were drawing near. No power on earth could save it.

In these circumstances Jeremiah sums up his verdict upon the kings and rulers of his day in general, under the figure of shepherds who have destroyed and scattered the sheep entrusted to them. The troubles which befell Judah, and led ultimately to its ruin, are traced by Jeremiah to the short-sightedness and studied neglect of those who were its responsible guides. "Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful

and multiply. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, saith the Lord." The unrighteous rulers will be deposed: wise and just ones, in the happier future which Jeremiah now begins to contemplate, will take their place. There follows the passage from which the text is taken: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgement and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness."

The prophet sees—

I. An Ideal King—a Righteous Branch, having this title, "The Lord is our righteousness."

II. National deliverance, when the fruits of righteousness shall be reaped in security and peace. "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely."

I.

Righteousness Enthroned.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch."

1. The same words are repeated further on. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel, and concerning the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land." Of course, the prophet was well acquainted with the prediction of his distinguished predecessor, Isaiah: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." At a later period, the name by which these two prophets had described that illustrious Person who should arise in the line of David's descendants to sit upon David's throne became recognized as one of the appropriate titles of the Prince-Messiah. Zechariah

twice speaks of Him as "the Branch." "Behold, I will bring forth my servant, the Branch"; "Behold the man whose name is the Branch." The attribute of *righteousness* is also assigned to Him by Isaiah. "With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."

2. Not only was the Branch to arise, but He was to sit on the throne of David, endued with power from on high. Jerusalem had seen many branches of the royal tree cut off and wither; this should be exalted and clothed with power; He was to reign and prosper. His spiritual kingdom should know no end, should be subject to no reverse. The strength of Judah should not be cut off again as of late, when Josiah fell at the battle of Megiddo, a righteous prince slain by the uncircumcised; but He should prosper, He should reign, not merely for His own good, as selfish rulers are wont to do, but for the good of His people. And who should they be? Not only the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, but the people of the whole earth; for all kingdoms, and nations, and languages should bow down before Him, and serve the Lord their Redeemer. He should "execute judgement and justice in the land." He should not give cause to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, saying, Behold the people of Israel, the chosen people; they all follow after iniquity, and their princes pervert justice. For "He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity."

3. The Branch was to have the significant designation "The Lord is our righteousness." In what sense are we to understand this name? The name which is applied to the ideal *king* in chap. xxiii. is applied to the ideal *city* in chap. xxxiii.; both alike are to be called by the same significant title, "Jehovah is our righteousness." There is something strange, to our ears, in a name thus formed; but it is in analogy with Hebrew usage. It was the custom of the ancient Israelites to form proper names compounded with one or other of the sacred names more freely than we should do. Thus they gave their children such names as "Jehovah (or God) heareth," or "remembereth," or

"judgeth," or "Jehovah is a help," or "is opulence," or again, "Jehovah is perfect," or "exalted," or "great." And we find places named similarly. Thus we read of an altar called "Jehovah is my banner," and of another called "Jehovah is peace." Names thus formed were felt, no doubt, to be words of good omen; or they were intended to mark what either was, or was hoped to be, a reality. The prophets, by an extension of this usage, not infrequently employ the name as the mark of a character, to be given to a person or place because the idea which it expressed was really inherent in him or it. Thus Isaiah, speaking of the ideal Zion of the future, says: "Afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city"—called so, namely, because the qualities of righteousness and faithfulness, so sadly lacking in the existing city, will be conspicuous in it. And Ezekiel, speaking of the restored Zion, says, in the last verse of his Book: "And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there"; he imagines, that is, a symbolical title, summing up in a brief and forcible manner the characteristic state or condition of the city.

The case is similar in Jeremiah. The city bears a name indicating the character of its inhabitants: God is the source and ground of their righteousness. Jerusalem is to become the home and abode of righteousness, through the gracious operation of her God. Here a similar name is given to the ideal king, or Messiah. He is the pledge and symbol to Israel that their righteousness was to have its source in God. Just as Isaiah, when Judah was sorely tried by external foes, had given his ideal king the symbolical name of "God is with us," as a guarantee that Divine help would be assured to them; so Jeremiah, at a time when the character of the people had largely deteriorated, gives him the symbolical name of "The Lord is our righteousness," significant of the fact that the nation's righteousness can be assured only by God. The ideal ruler whom Jeremiah foresees will govern his nation with wisdom and success; and under his gracious administration the Divinely imparted character of righteousness will be realized by the nation.

¶ The "name" is a brief and pointed censure upon a king whose character was the opposite of that described in these verses, yet who bore a name of almost identical meaning—Zedekiah, "Jehovah is my righteousness." The name of the last reigning

Prince of the House of David had been a standing condemnation of his unworthy life, but the King of the New Israel, Jehovah's true Messiah, would realize in His administration all that such a name promised. Sovereigns delight to accumulate sonorous epithets in their official designations—Highness, High and Mighty, Majesty, Serene, Gracious. The glaring contrast between character and titles often serves only to advertise the worthlessness of those who are labelled with such epithets—the Majesty of James I., the Graciousness of Richard III. Yet these titles point to a standard of true royalty, whether the sovereign be an individual or a class or the people; they describe that Divine Sovereignty which will be realized in the Kingdom of God.[1]

4. Jeremiah's prophecy is a foreshadowing of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. It is true that we are not distinctly told how this righteousness is to enter individual and national life, but we are assured that God's righteousness is the ground and source and guarantee of our righteousness. We are left in doubt as to whether Jeremiah so far anticipated the teaching of the New Testament as to view this righteousness as conferred through the agency of the same ideal ruler, whose name is designed as the symbol of the fact. The terms in which he speaks, however, do not suggest that he conceived him as the author of justification, in the theological sense of the term; they imply rather that he pictured him as ensuring, by his wise and just administration, the *conditions* under which righteousness of life might be maintained effectually among the people.

For us the question is, What are the conditions under which righteousness may become ours?

(1) *A passion for righteousness is rooted in human nature.*—It is God who has put the desire for righteousness in our hearts, and with all our carelessness we cannot drive it out. We cannot help reverencing all that is good when once we see it; even the fact that we are so ready to find fault with one another is the witness to the fact that we have an ideal of righteousness in our hearts. We may put it on one side as far as we can, but we shall find that it comes back, and that as youth and its pleasures pass away, and mature age and its ambitions, we shall realize more and more that righteousness is the one thing that matters. Sorrow may

[1] W. H. Bennett, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 325.

leave its mark upon us, or disillusionment may sour us, but there will remain one thing of which we are perfectly sure—that come what may, right is right and wrong is wrong, and nothing can turn the one into the other. We may be in just as much doubt as ever we were whether this or that is the right thing to do in this or that particular case, but we shall be quite sure that there is a right thing and a wrong thing, if only we had eyes to see.

¶ O these words "ought" and "ought not," "right" and "wrong"—how often men, how often we ourselves, would fain have banished them from the dictionary! Thank God they are not man-made words, and therefore cannot be man-changed. They shine aloft like stars. They are written—as David indicates in that glorious twin song of nature and human nature—they are written with the same ink that catalogues the stars: they are His sign-manual who hung these nightly seals. Rightly seeing one of them, seeing how the moral world lay behind the material:

> Thou dost protect the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient heavens by Thee are fresh and strong.

My brother, when next the tempter says "Transgress," "Do the forbidden," "Touch the accursed," "Handle the pitch-stained thing," wilt thou not say, "Dost thou bid me pluck the planets from their courses, cover the spangled heavens with sackcloth? Bid me as soon pull the strong firmament down. How can I do this great, because abnormal, thing?"[1]

(2) *The attainment of righteousness is beyond man's best efforts.* —Of course men have often fancied they could work out a righteousness for themselves. The Pharisees and the Jews generally imagined they could do so by ceremonial observances; and men commonly suppose it can be done by what are called good works, virtues, philanthropies, religious forms, penitential inflictions and such-like performances. But all these might exist without personal holiness. And since holiness means keeping God's law without defect, without transgression, without interruption, without a fleck or stain of moral defilement, nothing can be clearer than that no man has ever done or can do so.

A righteousness which begins and ends with *me*, and my efforts to make myself good, and to do so by living up to my own standard, can never really satisfy my best aspirations. The

[1] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 22.

stream cannot rise above its own source; with all my trying I cannot rise above my own standard for myself, and that standard is marred by my sins, is limited by the fact that after all it is only part of *me*. It is just that that I want to get away from. I want to be lifted above myself. In my best moments (and they, after all, are the moments that we must try to live by) I yearn, not only to be free from the limitations of my own lower nature and the web of bad habits that I have woven about myself, but to be lifted to a higher level altogether. Yes, I easily forget; the world and the flesh and the devil are very near and very insistent, but I hunger and thirst after a righteousness which shall *not* be my own: I long to be righteous "even as he is righteous."

¶ "I have vowed above a thousand times," said Staupitz, Luther's friend, "that I would become better, but I have never performed that which I vowed. Hereafter I will make no such vow, for I have now learned from experience that I am not able to perform it." Even Bernard Shaw has pointed out with much penetration that "it is possible for a man to pass the moral catechism, Have you obeyed the Commandments? have you kept the law? and at the end to live a worse life than the sinner who must answer Nay! all through the questions"; while W. R. Greg, content with low ideals, can only hope "that men may attain the measure of the stature of—William and Robert Chambers." [1]

¶ In Mr. Zangwill's masterly studies of the children of the Ghetto in olden days he describes with wonderful pathos and power the feelings of a Jewish boy when it was first brought home to him that beyond the walls of the Ghetto was a glorious world he was not allowed to enter, or, if he did, he must wear a badge of shame; on no condition whatever would he ever be permitted to share in its rich and brilliant life; he was born of an accursed race. Victor Hugo does much the same in his delineation of the life of that curious criminal underworld of mediæval Paris called the kingdom of Argot. The poor wretches who belonged to that kingdom were all outlaws, mostly thieves and vagabonds. It was tolerated by the officers of justice so long as its members kept within bounds. It had its own laws, administered by the outcasts themselves; and a certain standard of honour and good conduct was enforced, too. But once included in that community, whether by birth or by evil fortune, no one could ever get out of it; no amount of well-doing therein was of any use as a pass to citizenship in the kingdom of France. And so with the soul of man.

[1] T. Whitelaw, *Jehovah-Jesus*, 96.

Here on earth it is bound to an order of things which has its own constantly changing distinctions between good and evil, noble and ignoble, worthy and unworthy; but sometimes a vision is vouchsafed to it of a state of perfect freedom which knows none of these, nor needs to know them, but which it cannot enter; no earthly excellence is sufficient to open a pathway there.[1]

(3) *Christ is "made unto us righteousness."*—He who has put the yearning into our hearts has not left it unsatisfied. Because nothing less than that would do, He has given us His Son. Christ is our righteousness not merely as a teacher of what is righteous, not merely as a guide to the discovery of righteousness, but as the Procurer, the Author, the Source of that righteousness which we need. By Him the price of our redemption has been fully paid, and on the ground of what He has done, God, the Judge of all, stands ready to confer pardon and legal acquittal on all who come to Him through His Son. The righteousness, therefore, in which we are to be accepted of God is not a righteousness which we have to bring to Him, but a righteousness we have to receive from Him. It is already in His hands, and from Him alone can we obtain it. The Lord is our righteousness.

Sometimes we hear the criticism passed upon the gospel that it is unethical, that it disregards human merit as a means of access to eternal blessedness. "Salvation by magic" someone has called it. There is a semblance of truth in the charge. But why should not God be able to endue us with His own righteousness, share with us His own perfection, without any other qualification on our part than that of the faith that accepts the gift? If we have to wait for that consummation until our human standards of moral worth have risen high enough to qualify us for it, we shall not gain heaven in a million years; nor, indeed, shall we gain it at all, for there is something in the righteousness Divine which bears no ratio to any earthly good.

¶ A girl of twelve lay dying, and her mother said, "Are you afraid, my darling, to go and meet God?" "Oh no," she replied, "I am not afraid; I look to the justice of God to take me to heaven." The mother thought her child must be wandering, so she said, "My darling, you mean His pity, His love." "No, mother," she said, "I mean His justice; He must take me to heaven, because Christ is my righteousness, and I claim Him as

[1] R. J. Campbell.

ny own; I am as He is now in God's sight, and God would never eject His own child."[1]

Here where the loves of others close
The vision of my heart begins.
The wisdom that within us grows
Is absolution for our sins.

We took forbidden fruit and ate
Far in the garden of His mind.
The ancient prophecies of hate
We proved untrue, for He was kind.

He does not love the bended knees,
The soul made wormlike in His sight,
Within whose heaven are hierarchies
And solar kings and lords of light.

Who come before Him with the pride
The Children of the King should bear,
They will not be by Him denied,
His light will make their darkness fair.

To be afar from Him is death
Yet all things find their fount in Him:
And nearing to the sunrise breath
Shine jewelled like the seraphim.[2]

II.

Salvation Secured.

"In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely."

Jeremiah sought to comfort the Jews by telling them that the time of their sorrows and sufferings in captivity should pass away, and the days should come in which they should once more be safe from their enemies. Out of the royal house of David, now brought so low, so decayed, that it was but as a dry root in the ground there should spring a fresh Branch, even the Messiah.

[1] H. W. Webb-Peploe, *The Titles of Jehovah*, 168.
[2] "A. E.," *Collected Poems*, 247.

He should reign over the true Israel, His Church, and should protect, guard, and keep them from harm. He should gather His people together, and unite them once more; and so glorious and blessed would this deliverance be that, compared with it, the coming out of the bondage of Egypt would be as nothing.

1. God's purpose for the earth was that it should be replenished and subdued and governed by a race which in that activity should themselves come to perfection. Human failure intervened, and a Divine interference was necessary by which in the midst of human history a new race was created, related to all the other races and part of the entire race, their responsibility being that of realizing the Divine intention, and the secret of their greatness being that all the people should be righteous; until, in process of time, failure having followed upon failure, we have the supreme Divine interference in the coming of the God-man, the new birth of man, and the creation of a new race, an elect race, a royal priesthood, a chosen nation, a people for God's possession; and the great Christian apostle is seen devoting time and strength and toil and energy to every individual that every man may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus.

In national life the true prosperity of the nation depends upon the multitude of her people in order to the fulfilling and subduing of natural resources, and in order to the making of a people by such toil. There is nothing more important in national life than the multitude of the people; and in order to the people's true strength industry is sacred. The Pauline principle may be stated by way of illustration: "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." This is no mere word of political significance, in the narrower sense of the word political. It is fundamental. It is fundamental to national prosperity. In order to the realization of the natural resources of the land, their subduing, their government, their proper use, their leading out to all fulfilment, the most important thing is the multitude of the people; and the toil that subdues is most important to the people. The scattering of a people is therefore a crime. Its restoration and increase mean stability and strength.

¶ The final test of all legislation is the effect it produces upon the people that create the national strength. In proportion as a

ıation learns the value, as to its supreme welfare, of its sons and ts daughters, its little children, in that proportion the nation is noving in the true line of progress, that of the Divine purpose ınd programme, which brings it into right relationship with the ıltimate intention of God. In proportion as children are allowed o fade and wither and die in evil conditions, for the enrichment of a few, the blight of the curse of humanity and Deity rests upon he national life. In proportion as we realize that our wealth consists in our people we approximate to that Divine intention expressed in the words, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish ınd subdue and have dominion over the earth." In that way, and in that way alone, we approximate to national strength.[1]

2. The greatness and prosperity of any people rest ultimately on character. "Thy people shall be all righteous" was Isaiah's great dream. The deep secret of their victories was that of the enthronement of Jehovah; and resulting from it the people were seen as all righteous, and consequently the nation was seen as an instrument of the Divine purpose, possessing the land, bringing forth its beauties, realizing them. Thus the nation realized itself, and became in the midst of the earth, the exhibition of the Divine purpose for all the world, the Divine intention for all humanity. It was the dream of a prophet in the midst of a decadent age. Actually the people were falling, soon were to be driven away, but here we have the holy and inspired vision of God's purpose, and out of the midst of it we hear these words: "Thy people shall be all righteous."

¶ So far at the outset of his Parliamentary life, the opinions of Benjamin Disraeli, if we take *Sybil* for their exponent, were the opinions of the author of *Past and Present*. Carlyle thought of him as a fantastic ape. The interval between them was so vast that the comparison provokes a smile; and yet the Hebrew conjurer, though at a humble distance, and not without an eye open to his own advancement, was nearer to him all along than Carlyle imagined. Disraeli did not believe any more than he that the greatness of a nation depended on the abundance of its possessions. He did not believe in a progress which meant the abolition of the traditionary habits of the people, the destruction of village industries, and the accumulation of the population into enormous cities, where their character and their physical qualities would be changed and would probably degenerate. The only

[1] G. Campbell Morgan.

progress which he could acknowledge was moral progress, and he considered that all legislation which proposed any other object to itself would produce, in the end, the effects which the prophets of his own race had uniformly and truly foretold.[1]

¶ Patriotism is doubtless a great and necessary virtue; it must always regulate much that we do, but it should not therefore narrow our aspirations. A nation, as well as an individual, has much to learn, and must learn it, as the individual learns, mainly by sympathetic intercourse with like-minded nations. On this gradual education of nations, more than anything else, the hope of the world's future depends. Nations with like ideas of righteousness go forth on their separate ways, not that they may emphasize the differences which arise from differing experience, but that they may bring the results of their experience to a common stock. It is not enough that each nation should recognize and glorify the ideas on which its vigorous life is founded as it knows them. It must learn from the experience of other nations to understand them better and apply them more thoroughly. It is man's highest wisdom humbly to seek to understand God's will in things great and small; in the concerns of a particular hearth and home; in the questions which concern his country's welfare; and in those greater issues on which the future of the world's progress depends. Our personal efforts, whatever they be, only avail if they are in accordance with God's purpose. If we have done our best to discover this purpose, and with our whole heart to work for it, we cannot ultimately fail. This purpose floats before our eyes in the form of a vision, capable of realization here and now, of a time when all peoples shall be happy in the knowledge of the Lord as their God.[2]

3. The righteous nation serving a righteous king will enjoy security and peace. "Israel shall dwell safely." Such shall be the confidence of the spiritual Israel that they shall dwell even thoughtlessly and carelessly, as the original word implies—not careless as to their manner of life; not thoughtless as to the nature of the Divine requirements and rightful claims of humanity; but careless, as being free from care, since God careth for His own; careless as knowing in whom they have believed, and persuaded that He is able to keep that which has been entrusted to Him. Happy people that thus dwell safely! "Israel dwelleth in safety:

[1] J. A. Froude, *The Earl of Beaconsfield*, 92.

[2] Bishop Creighton, *Counsels for Churchpeople*, 37.

the fountain of Jacob [the progenitors of a great people] alone, in a land of corn and wine; yea, his heavens drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: Who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord!"

4. True, the ideal state foreshadowed by Jeremiah has not yet been realized; the law of God is not yet written so indelibly upon the hearts of men that all can be said to act upon it instinctively, or that we can yet afford, as some strange sectaries have imagined that we could afford, to dispense with teachers and instructors, and other methods of reminding us what that law is. But it is upon a profound sense of the requirements of human nature that the prophet's declaration is based; and it is one of the most far-reaching and comprehensive anticipations of the ultimate destiny of human history that are to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. It sets vividly before us what should be the aim of our endeavours, and the goal of our aspiration. And so, every time that, in our public services, the Decalogue is recited, it is followed by the petition, expressed in the very words of the prophet, that the laws of which it is the sum may be "written in our hearts."

¶ The remotest fibre of human action, from the policy of empires to the most insignificant trifle over which we waste an idle hour or moment, either moves in harmony with the true law of our being, or is else at discord with it. A king or a parliament enacts a law, and we imagine we are creating some new regulation, to encounter unprecedented circumstances. The law itself which applied to these circumstances was enacted from eternity. It has its existence independent of us, and will enforce itself either to reward or punish, as the attitude which we assume towards it is wise or unwise. Our human laws are but the copies, more or less imperfect, of the eternal laws so far as we can read them, and either succeed and promote our welfare, or fail and bring confusion and disaster, according as the legislator's insight has detected the true principle, or has been distorted by ignorance or selfishness.

And these laws are absolute, inflexible, irreversible, the steady friends of the wise and good, the eternal enemies of the blockhead and the knave. No Pope can dispense with a statute enrolled in the Chancery of Heaven, or popular vote repeal it. The discipline is a stern one, and many a wild endeavour men have made to obtain less hard conditions, or imagine them other than they are. They have conceived the rule of the Almighty to be like the rule

of one of themselves. They have fancied that they could bribe or appease Him—tempt Him by penance or pious offering to suspend or turn aside His displeasure. They are asking that His own eternal nature shall become other than it is. One thing only they can do. They for themselves, by changing their own courses, can make the law which they have broken thenceforward their friend. Their dispositions and nature will revive and become healthy again when they are no longer in opposition to the will of their Maker.[1]

¶ The world seems to be weary of the just, righteous, holy ways of God, and of that exactness in walking according to His institutions and commands which it will be one day known that He doth require. But the way to put a stop to this declension is not by accommodating the commands of God to the corrupt courses and ways of men. The truths of God and the holiness of His precepts must be pleaded and defended, though the world dislike them here and perish hereafter. His law must not be made to lackey after the wills of men, nor be dissolved by vain interpretations, because they complain they cannot, indeed because they will not, comply with it. Our Lord Jesus Christ came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them, and to supply men with spiritual strength to fulfil them also. It is evil to break the least commandment; but there is a great aggravation of that evil in them that shall teach men so to do.[2]

¶ Law, so far as it can be used to form and system, and is not written upon the heart,—as it is, in a Divine loyalty, upon the hearts of the great hierarchies who serve and wait about the throne of the Eternal Lawgiver,—this lower and formally expressible law has, I say, two objects. It is either for the definition and restraint of sin, or the guidance of simplicity; it either explains, forbids, and punishes wickedness, or it guides the movements and actions both of lifeless things and of the more simple and untaught among responsible agents. And so long, therefore, as sin and foolishness are in the world, so long it will be necessary for men to submit themselves painfully to this lower law, in proportion to their need of being corrected, and to the degree of childishness or simplicity by which they approach more nearly to the condition of the unthinking and inanimate things which are governed by law altogether; yet yielding in the manner of their submission to it, a singular lesson to the pride of man,—being obedient more perfectly in proportion to their greatness. But, so far as men become good and wise, and rise above the state of children, so far they become emancipated from this written law, and invested

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies*, ii. 11. [2] John Owen.

with the perfect freedom which consists in the fulness and joyfulness of compliance with a higher and unwritten law; a law so universal, so subtle, so glorious that nothing but the heart can keep it.

Now pride opposes itself to the observance of this Divine law in two opposite ways; either by brute resistance, which is the way of the rabble and its leaders, denying or defying law altogether; or by formal compliance, which is the way of the Pharisee, exalting himself while he pretends to obedience, and making void the infinite and spiritual commandment by the finite and lettered commandment. And it is easy to know which law we are obeying: for any law which we magnify and keep through pride, is always the law of the letter; but that which we love and keep through humility, is the law of the Spirit; and the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, vol. ii. chap. ii. § 87 (*Works*, xi. 116).

Everlasting Love.

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Everlasting Love.

The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.—Jer. xxxi. 3.

This tender and gracious assurance appears here in a somewhat unexpected connexion. The Book of Jeremiah, taken as a whole, is a sad book; it consists in the main of warnings, expostulations, and prophecies of doom; and these prophecies are shown in process of fulfilment almost while they were being uttered. It is a sombre picture of human life which is presented to us in these vivid pages. And yet here we have, in the very midst of all this darkness and all these oracles of stern judgment, the sweet utterance which forms the text: "The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." With lovingkindness? Loved with an everlasting love? Nothing could have seemed less like it just then. Fierce, terrible, merciless were the ways of God to Israel so far as appearances went, and not without cause. Love was about the last word that could describe the relations of these suffering people to their offended God.

Think what the circumstances were. The chosen people were ripe for judgment. There were two invasions within a few years of each other, each of them involving a siege of Jerusalem and the carrying away of thousands of prisoners into captivity. The scenes of horror associated with both must have been indescribably dreadful, especially after the second, when Jerusalem was left a heap of smoking ruins. It was in the interval between these two sieges that the text was most probably spoken, and the fact is surprising when we consider the circumstances. The prophet's view is that God's love is not shown by His leaving His people to perish morally in the slough of an enervating security, but rather in the infliction of suffering which purifies the soul by

the discipline of the flesh. He holds, with wonderful insight, that their sorrows not only are punishments for their sins, but are of the nature of a drastic preparation for the unique work which Israel had yet to do in the world. He foretells the return from the Captivity, which at the moment was only just beginning —in fact, the greater of the two Captivities had not yet taken place; Jerusalem was still standing and autonomous at the time the prophecy was uttered. Jeremiah says that after seventy years the exiles will be permitted to return to their own land, and then will commence their distinctive spiritual mission to all the nations upon earth. And this, as we now know, came true to the letter.

There are three strands in the prophet's thought—

I. The love of God lies behind the darkest experiences of life.

II. This love is everlasting and changeless.

III. It is a tender and individual love, manifesting itself as lovingkindness.

I.

Love Offered from Afar.

"The Lord appeared of old unto me."

1. The words, "The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying," etc., might mean either that the prophet had been convinced from early days, as well as all through the period of affliction, that God is a God of love; or it might mean, and more probably does mean, as the Hebrew literally states, "The Lord appeared *from afar* unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The expression "from afar" suggests the more beautiful idea of the two. The thought is that God hears, as it were, from afar, the cry of His children and comes to their relief. The image suggested is that of the poor enslaved children of Zion far away in a strange land stretching their hands towards their ancient home and praying to God, whose altar once stood there, to come to their deliverance; and God hears that prayer and comes and breaks down their prison walls and brings them back.

¶ Jeremiah represents Jehovah as seeking to win back His chosen people to Himself under the figure of a lover wooing a maiden. Jehovah speaks from His far-away dwelling-place, and when the "virgin of Israel," in her distant exile, hears him, she answers, "From afar Jehovah appeared unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

Then Jehovah makes answer:

Again will I build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel:
Again shalt thou take thy tabrets and go forth in the dances of them that make merry;
Again shalt thou plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria; while they that plant shall enjoy the fruit.[1]

2. But in a still deeper sense the meaning is that those who are afar from God in spirit will be heard and helped by Him at the first instant of their turning towards Him again. The saying is in substance almost exactly the same as that immortal utterance of the Master in the parable of the Prodigal Son, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." It is not that God is a great way off, but that we in spirit may be a great way off from the apprehension of His eternal holiness and truth. But the grace of God takes advantage of every smallest opportunity to find entrance to the soul. "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." The faintest motion of our spirits Godward brings Him to our assistance. There may be very little in us for His goodness to take hold of, but such as it is He makes use of it. Those desolate Jews who lay in tears by the waters of Babylon were scarcely conscious of any change in their spiritual condition beyond the fact that they had suffered; they had been tried in the fire; their worldly delights had been rudely and cruelly swept away from them, but they could not yet have been capable of very much in the way of heavenly-mindedness. Nevertheless, says the prophet, God grasped at the little they had and gave Himself to increase it. It is the same with us. When everything is going well with us in the outer world we may be far from the Kingdom

[1] H. W. Battle.

of Heaven, but when trouble overtakes us our thoughts turn more readily to God and things eternal.

¶ During my absence I discovered the fact that love vanquishes distance, and — I think I may say it reverently — that love vanquishes death. I seemed to see it as a network of golden filaments, invisible to the selfish eye, but holding together the whole world. Moreover, India showed to me, much more clearly than I ever gathered before I went, the lovelessness of men when they have not heard or have not believed that God is Love.

Religion there is fear, not love; worship there is an attempt to propitiate the baleful and destructive forces in the midst of which we have to live; love has no part in it. In Mohammedanism, which has taken a fifth of India under its leadership and inspired them with its ideal, there is only submission to the Supreme Authority, but no love. I came back, therefore, as you can imagine, with quite a new apprehension of the meaning of the words of this text; and I wonder whether I ever could have learned the full meaning of that word apart from the experiences of the past few months.[1]

3. The crowning glory of the Christian religion, the sum of all its glories, is its God. He is one; He is personal; He is self-existent, almighty, eternal; He is holy, wise, loving and good. Fairbairn states that the transcendent moment for man, the moment of supreme promise and of grandest hope, was when the idea of a moral deity entered his heart, when all the energies of religion came to be moral energies for the making of moral men. "The moment when gravitation, navigation, the secrets of the sea, or the stars, or the earth, were discovered had neither singly nor all combined equal or even approximate significance for man. Take from him this religion steeped in morality, made living by the moral character of its God, and you will leave him without the grandest energy working for God and peace and progress that ever came into his history or into his heart."

"At heart Christianity is simply a revelation of a perfect God, doing the work of perfect love and holiness for His creatures and transforming men into His own likeness, so that they will do the work of love and holiness towards their fellows." He is the universal Father, the giver of every good gift and every perfect gift. It is in Him that we live and move and have our being.

[1] R. F. Horton.

He is interested in the welfare of every child made in His image, and makes all things work together for his good. "His glory is to diffuse happiness, and fill up the silent places of the universe with voices that speak out of glad hearts."

¶ The greatest of the philosophers of Greece did but sum up the belief of antiquity when he put into the mouth of Phaedrus the words: "Love is a mighty god, and wonderful among gods and men, but especially wonderful in his birth. For he is the eldest of the gods, which is an honour to him; and a proof of his claim to this honour is, that of his parents there is no memorial; neither poet nor prose-writer has ever affirmed that he had any."[1]

4. There is nothing that so challenges the attention of the non-Christian peoples as the statement that God is love and that He loves them and desires their redemption and their present and eternal well-being. There is nothing that impresses them as this does. Missionaries say that people who were disposed to shut their ears to the message and to drive them away were profoundly affected by the story of God's love and mercy and goodness. When they heard a little they were eager to hear more. The story is so unlike anything they ever heard or imagined and so pleasing in itself that they are charmed by it. It is to them like good news from a far country, like rivers of water in a dry place, like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

¶ Friendship and love [he wrote to Professor von Wyss of Zürich] are the deepest springs of happiness in this world. And what else is the sum of Christianity than God's love in Christ, Christ for the world and we for Christ? The theology of the future must start from John's definition of God, "God is love." Just now we have set on foot in the Presbyterian Church a revision of the Westminster Confession. The Confession is too rigidly Calvinistic for my liking, a creed for the small number of the elect but not for the whole world for which the Saviour died.

We need a theology, we need a confession, that starts from the living person of Jesus Christ, the God-man and Saviour of the world. This is the burden of Peter's confession, the fruitful germ of all creeds; this is a central fact and truth on which all true Christians can agree. We need a theology and a confession that is inspired and controlled, not by the idea of Divine justice, which is a consuming fire, but by the idea of Divine love, which is life

[1] R. E. Hutton, *The Crown of Christ*, ii. 254.

and peace. Love is the key which unlocks His character and all His works. And this love extends to all His creatures, and has made abundant provision in Christ for the salvation of ten thousand worlds.[1]

¶ God is love, and I for one can never conceive that God shuts out any human being from that love either here or in the world to come. But I think that a man can, and often does, as we know, so harden himself in sin here that *he* shuts away the love of God from himself. Now, God never compels, so that it is possible that this process may go on hereafter. I cannot conceive God not trying to reach the soul, but I can conceive the soul getting so hardened and devilish that it may go on resisting for ever.[2]

I vexed me with a troubled thought,
That God might be
A God whose mercy must be bought
With misery.

But there's no wrath to be appeased
In heaven above;
No wrath with bitter anguish pleased,
For God is Love.

No pleasure from our suffering
The Lord could steal,
Or anguish of the meanest thing
He made to feel.

But on Himself the grief He took,
The pain and loss
And shame of sin, and its rebuke
Upon the Cross.

For love rejoiceth not in pain
Of good or bad,
But beareth all, and still is fain
To make us glad.

Love circles us with mercies sweet,
And guides our way,
And sheds its light around our feet
By night and day.

[1] *The Life of Philip Schaff*, 428.
[2] *Bishop John Selwyn: A Memoir*, 256.

O love of Jesus! love of heaven!
O holy Dove,
Teach all the ransomed and forgiven
That God is Love.[1]

II.

Love that Lasts.

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

The love of God is everlasting and changeless in contrast to that of other lovers. Elsewhere Jeremiah says, "All thy lovers have forgotten thee." Israel had had many lovers professing regard and offering service; but what had their regard and service come to? They were now cold, careless, perhaps even hostile. They had shown the appearance of love to Israel, not that they cared for Israel, but because they themselves were advantaged. Now, that is no true affection which changes when the thing loved ceases to gratify us. Yet this was all that the affection of these other lovers amounted to—a mere name of love, a feeling which, in the course of time, was to evince their own instability and bring shame to them. But God is a contrast to all this. He loves with an everlasting love. He loved Israel, not only in the days of prosperity and wealth and beauty, but in the days of downfall and despair. His thought penetrates through to the abiding worth of humanity. We do not slander human affection, or in any way underestimate it, when we say that man cannot love his fellow-man as God loves him. God it is who first of all shows man what love really is; then man, having the Spirit of the Divine Father breathed into him, learns to love also. We cannot attain to anything which will give us the right to say with respect to duration that ours is an everlasting love; but, as true Christians, we may have something of the quality of that affection.

1. *Love is everlasting.*—It is from the first to the last. Love *was*, before love was expressed, as design is in the mind of the architect before he produces his drawings, and as harmony in the

[1] Walter C. Smith.

soul of the composer of music before he has written a musical passage. From everlasting, until the day of creation, love was pent up, if one may so speak, in the being of God, as the central fires of our globe, or as the waters of a spring without an outlet. It was unmanifest then, as the light below the horizon ere the morning has dawned. This cannot be said of selfishness or sin in any form. Sin is old, but sin is not eternal. One can look back through the past and see where sin begins; we cannot look back through the past and see where love begins, it is from everlasting.

¶ In a letter dated June 22, 1864, Clerk Maxwell, who was then Professor of Natural Philosophy at King's College, London, wrote to his wife: "Love is an eternal thing, and love between father and son or husband and wife is not temporal if it be the right sort, for if the love of Christ and the Church be a reason for loving one another, and if the one be taken as an image of the other, then, if the mind of Christ be in us, it will produce this love as part of its complete nature, and it cannot be that the love which is first made holy, as being a reflection of part of the glory of Christ, can be any way lessened or taken away by a more complete transformation into the image of the Lord. I have been back at 1 Cor. xiii. I think the description of charity or Divine love is another loadstone for our life—to show us that this is one thing which is not in parts, but perfect in its own nature, and so it shall never be done away. It is nothing negative, but a well-defined, living, almost acting picture of goodness; that kind of it which is human, but also divine."[1]

2. *God's love is continuous.*—"He loved us from the first of time, He loves us to the last." As His love cared for us in the past, it continues to care for us during the whole of our earthly life, notwithstanding all that may appear to be at variance with it. As it embraced us at first, irrespective of any good qualities in ourselves, so it embraces us throughout the whole of our varying experience. Our trials are no proof of its having forsaken us. Our unworthiness and sinfulness have not driven it away. When Israel was suffering as the consequence of wrong-doing, even then God bore testimony to His everlasting love, and intimated that through their suffering He would wean them from their sin, and thus promote their welfare. Thus did it prove its immutability

[1] *The Life of James Clerk Maxwell*, 338.

amidst all changes in their experience, and in spite of all faults in their character.

Man's love ebbs and flows like the tide. Often it is as fickle as it is fervent. Sometimes when it talks loudest we can trust it least. Absence may cool it. Some little disappointment or opposition may change it into ill-concealed or unconcealed dislike. But there are no such changes in the love of God. His is no ebbing and flowing tide, but a sea, like the Mediterranean, ever full. His is no waxing and waning moon, but a full-orbed sun for ever shining in its strength. It shines as brightly and strongly now as it has ever done throughout the ages that are past; and it will continue to shine with the same brightness and strength throughout all the ages that are to come.

Our hearts may be well-nigh broken under some crushing sorrow; the light of our life may be taken away; the bitterness of death may enter our homes; the winter of an intolerable discontent may smite within us every spring of happiness and leave only the consciousness of a misery that hardly dares to lift its head. God may seem far away from us—at least as a power of love—in the midst of the darkness that surrounds us. The very sun may be turned into blackness, and the flowers of the earth and the charms of the sea and sky, which were once as the breath of Paradise, may seem only to add to our misery. But the voice of God is not still because man does not hear it, and the love of God is not gone because man does not feel it. It is still crying to us; it abides as an everlasting fact. No cloud can extinguish it, however it may obscure it; no misery born of the depths of human despair, no tragedy of human agony or of human crime, can make that love doubtful. It is still there; it is around us; it is with us; its everlasting arms are holding us even when we cannot feel it, and grasping us in its soft embrace although our feet may be bleeding and sore with the hardness of the road along which we travel.

> I cannot go
> Where Universal Love smiles not around,
> Sustaining all yon orbs and all their suns;
> From seeming evil still educing good,
> And better thence again, and better still,
> In infinite progression.[1]

[1] James Thomson.

3. *To the Divine love there is absolutely no end.*—Never having begun, it will never terminate, but will last as long as God Himself shall live; for throughout the eternity which is His lifetime He never ceases to be Himself, and He is love. We have in His love, therefore, a guarantee not only for our present but for our future welfare. Never can we reach a point in our existence in which this love will not encircle and provide for us. When we come to die, He will love us as much in dying as He has loved us while we lived. When we appear at His judgment-seat, He will love us as much as when He gave Christ to die for us; through all eternity He will love us as much as He has ever done.

¶ To a friend who was experiencing a heavy sorrow, Dr. Martineau wrote, "Often the love of God is hid—passes behind the cloud and leaves us with a cold shudder of alarm, as if it were not there. But the Divine realities do not depend on our apprehension of them; the eclipse of our vision makes no difference to their shining, except to us. The Infinite Love abides behind, and waits till we return to it, and the intercepting veil falls away. At times, I think, when the mists of fear and distrust gather round the heart, it is even better to forget Him till He finds us again, and say: 'I will possess my soul in patience,' than to accuse either Him or oneself of deserting a relation which is suspended, it may be, only to be more closely bound."[1]

III.

Love as Lovingkindness.

"Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

1. Here again is an alternative rendering. It might be, as the margin of the Revised Version has it, "I have continued lovingkindness unto thee." But the expression as it stands is truer to the facts. The profound idea which it enshrines is that, despite appearances, the afflictions of Israel have all been the instruments of God's love, means whereby He has been drawing His people towards Himself and towards a higher destiny than they knew. The sublime declaration thus made is that God draws His children by kindness even when it seems most like cruelty. It is almost

[1] *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, i. 450.

audacious in its defiance of probabilities as judged from the standpoint of the natural man. Jeremiah calmly tells his contemporaries that all the ruin, woe, and devastation through which they were at the moment passing was a mode of the loving-kindness of God. One can hardly wonder that they refused to believe him, for anything more unlike the evidence of their senses it would have been difficult to find. We shall never reach the heart of the mystery of earthly misery and wretchedness by any exercise of the mind, but only by development of soul. For here is an amazing paradox—that the very thing which to the wisdom of this world is the most conclusive demonstration that there is no Divine love is that wherein the spiritual mind discerns it most clearly.

True love is not mere benevolence, it is a burning fire, a passionate eagerness to possess the souls of those who are loved. Therefore it is that the perfect love of God embraces what in our poor earthly language we term the wrath of God against all unrighteousness of men and also the grief of the Holy Spirit at man's ingratitude, as where it is written "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." There is no contradiction between those two great texts, "God is love" and "Our God is a consuming fire," for the Love Divine is a Consuming Fire, which warms, lightens, and quickens all whose nature will receive it, but burns up all the wood, hay, stubble which cannot receive it. And so when the sword flashes forth in terrible judgment, the Hand behind the cloud that wields it is the Hand of Love.

¶ You see the child running in from the garden full of tears, and saying, "Something has hurt me." On examination it is found that a thorn is in one of his fingers. Then the gentlest of hands will endeavour to extract it. When she is doing so the child will cry out, "Oh, mother, you hurt me." Ah, it is not the mother that hurts, but the thorn. When God takes out the thorn, we think that He hurts us. Not so, it is the thorn. Even God cannot take sin out of the heart without its giving pain. "Woe is me; who will deliver me from this body of death?" There are trials and disappointments, there are crosses and burdens, and we feel them keenly. God is then extracting the thorns. But in all His dealings His tender mercy is over all His works. Everywhere, and at all times, it is His *lovingkindness.*[1]

[1] T. Davies.

2. Nothing but lovingkindness can draw men to goodness. No coercive force—only the force of love—can bring the sinner into repentance and faith—the repentance that shall not be repented of, and the faith that will secure the favour of God. It would be an easy matter for God to crush the sinner, and deprive him of every facility for sin; but it is a different matter to crush his sin and the desire which fosters it. The sinner may quail in the presence of God's displeasure, or he may cease altogether from sin by reason of the abuse and the destruction of natural force; but there is no virtue in his tremor; there is no faith in his weakness. The sinner must be made willing to part with his sin. The power to effect this comes from God, but it can be applied only when the willing cry rends his heart—"Lord, save, or I perish."

¶ I understand the word "drawn" to be used here as the opposite of "driven." I take the meaning to be, "It is because I love you that I do not force you; I desire to *win* by love." We often express surprise that human life does not reveal more traces of God's omnipotence. We see the visible universe subject to inexorable law and yielding submissively to that law. But man does not yield submissively; he resists the will of the Eternal. Why should he be allowed to resist? Is he not but an atom in the infinite spaces—these spaces that obey the heavenly mandate? Why not put down his insane rebellion and crush his proud will into conformity with the universal chorus? The Bible gives its answer. It is because love is incompatible with the exercise of omnipotence. Inexorable law can rule the stars; but the stars are not an object of love. Man is an object of love, and therefore he can be ruled only by love—as the prophet puts it, "drawn." Nothing is a conquest for love but the power of drawing. Omnipotence can subdue by driving—but that is not a conquest for love; it is rather a sign that love is baffled. Therefore it is that our Father does not *compel* us to come in. He would have us "drawn" by the beauty of holiness; therefore He veils all that would force the will.[1]

¶ Two beautiful allegories by the late Mr. Munro, *The Journey Home* and *The Dark Mountains*, describe a certain Palace of Unbelief, belonging to Azrael, the Prince of Darkness. It has no background; its motto is: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Here the careless revellers are disturbed by the sudden arrival of an unlooked-for visitor. His name is Conscience. He

[1] G. Matheson, *Thoughts for Life's Journey*, 70.

is pale and stern, with the starry crown of Truth upon his white forehead. All shrink back trembling at his approach, as though from the angel of death himself. Yet he does not win the wanderers back to the narrow way. They do but shudder for a moment at the awful vision. Then, once more, they strive to drown the new like the old cares, in mirth and debauchery. But ere long another unbidden guest enters Azrael's palace. His head is crowned not with stars but with thorns. His eye tells not of wrath, but of mercy. His words are words of love unspeakable—the love that in Gethsemane and on Calvary showed itself stronger than death. And that mighty love prevails. The fetters of lust and selfishness and pride are broken, and the prisoner is free.[1]

3. God's love is truly personal; it is the love of one loving heart for another. When God is speaking to the Jewish nation, He very often, and as a rule, addresses them as if they were one person. Was it that He always saw Abraham in them? Was it that He always saw the Messiah in them? Or is it the language of affection? The more earnest we are in anything, the more we point our words. And so God, gathering in the wide circumference of His comprehensive love for every Jew, in every age, to the centre of a single man, says, "I have loved thee." For with God the capacity of love is universal. It embraces all. Yet it individualizes all. It is to you and to me, and all who believe in Him and look to Him as a Father. How personal always was the ministry of our Lord! "Come unto me." "Take up my cross." "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

¶ God's love is like His sunlight, diffused throughout the heavens, catching the heights of the hills and crowning them with ruddy gold and clothing them in purple. So it seems to us an easy and a natural thing for God to love some people; outstanding men and women whose goodness might make them dear to Him. But this is not all that the sun does. It climbs higher that it may creep lower—down the hillsides farther and farther, until it lifts the mists of the valley and covers the meadows with its glory: and kisses the daisy and fills its cup with gold, and puts energy and strength into its very heart. God loves the good, the true, the pure, but His love rises higher that it may come down lower; and He loves *me—me*.[2]

[1] E. Curling, *The Transfiguration*, 103.
[2] M. G. Pearse, *Parables and Pictures*, 52.

¶ Let me link together detached sentences from the Word, that in their associations we may discern what is meant by the depth of the love of God. "The high and lofty One whose name is holy." . . . "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God . . . began to wash the disciples' feet." "And one cried with another, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!" . . . "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." All these are suggestive of what is meant by the love-depths of our God. It is only the really lofty that can truly reach the really deep. The arm that can reach far upward is the only arm that can reach far downward. It is only holy love that can deal with humanity's deepest needs. A low love has no depths of service. Low love is a thing of compromise, and has no dealings with extremes, whether of holiness or of sin. Holy love, crystalline love, goes down and down into human necessity, and is not afraid of the taint. Sunbeams can move among sewage and catch no defilement. The brilliant, holy love of God ministers in the deepest depths of human need.

God's love is deeper than human sorrow. Drop your plummet-line into the deepest sea of sorrow, and at the end of all your soundings, "underneath are the everlasting arms." God's love is deeper than death, and there are multitudes who know how deep grim death can be. "Just twelve months ago," said a near friend of mine a week or two ago, "I dug a deep grave!" Aye, and I know it was deep enough. But the grave-digger's spade cannot get beneath our Father's love. God's love is deeper than the deepest grave you ever dug! "And entering into the sepulchre they saw an angel," and you can never dig into any dreary, dreary dwelling of death which is beyond the reach of those white-robed messengers of eternal love. Yes, God's love is deeper than death. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

And God's love is deeper than sin. Listen to this: "He descended into hell," and He will descend again if you are there. "If I make my bed in hell. Thou art there." "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." "He *bore* our sin"; then He got beneath it; down to it and beneath it; and there is no human wreckage, lying in the ooze of the deepest sea of iniquity, that His deep love cannot reach and redeem. What a Gospel! However far down, God's love can get beneath it![1]

[1] J. H. Jowett, *Things that Matter Most*, 15.

The New Covenant.

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The New Covenant.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant ith the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the venant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the nd to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, though I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this is the venant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith e Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I rite it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall ach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, now the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the eatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their n will I remember no more.—Jer. xxxi. 31–34.

This is one of the greatest messages that the Old Testament ntains. Were we to distinguish degrees of importance by fference of type, then these verses ought to be printed in the ldest lettering, so as to catch every eye. Here is a prophecy at foretells Christianity, that anticipates the New Testament. hen the prophet delivers this oracle, he speaks as a Christian rn long before the time. When we look on all that is best and ost distinctive in the Christian faith, we are entitled to say, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in our ears." It was of these ords our Lord was thinking when He instituted the sacrament the Supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my ood." That New Covenant was neither more nor less than the ew Covenant of which Jeremiah prophesied. And the whole pistle to the Hebrews, which labours to show to half-converted ws the vast superiority of Christianity to the religion of their thers, may be called a sermon on this great text.

¶ If we are to get at the heart of Jeremiah's meaning we had tter change this word "covenant" into the word "religion," and e full significance of the prophet's startling teaching will begin dawn upon us. That is a fair enough equivalent. The word religion" does not occur in the Old Testament, but the word

"covenant" is found some three hundred times; and when it is used to describe the relation of the people to God it really means religion. The core of the covenant is, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," but if you wanted to describe a true and living religion, could you come across better words than these to mark the relation to God in which it consists?[1]

2. The words were uttered at a time of national disaster. Jerusalem was captured by the Assyrians, and Jeremiah was taken prisoner to Ramah. During the time of his imprisonment he looked forward to the day when Israel should again be free. Before that could happen, however, he saw that a great change must come over the people. The Old Covenant had proved a failure, not by reason of its own defects, but by reason of the conception of it as an external and legal code, imposing its laws upon a people whose inward spiritual life it had long ceased to reflect. Now the glory of Jeremiah is that in that dark night his heart was filled with hope. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." Religion is not to die, although the forms in which of old it found expression are antiquated and ready to perish. A better religion is to rise out of the ashes. He is the prophet of a new religion. He cannot mourn. He cannot sorrow and be in continual heaviness. If he sees Simeon in the Temple tottering and on the brink of the grave, he sees that he holds the infant Christ in his arms. The new and the better age is about to be; the light of the morning is on his face; it is the shadows of the night that flee away. Here indeed is an inspiring optimism. The political order changes; the ecclesiastical order changes; the theological order changes; and through all, not only does religion not die, but it passes forward to a nobler, worthier life; it becomes purer, more spiritual, more personal.

¶ Archdeacon Boutflower, who was Bishop Westcott's domestic chaplain throughout his episcopate, refers as follows to his Diocesan's hopefulness and faith in the future of Christianity:— "Parallel to that freshness of powers and interest which the Bishop brought to his last day of work, and still more wonderful, was the freshness of hope and sympathy which he carried to the end. This, no doubt, was cultivated in contemplation, but it was a singular grace of temperament to start with. In mind he never grew old. Occasionally he would say, 'I am too old for such

[1] A. Ramsay, *Studies in Jeremiah*, 263.

things now'; but it was not really true, and only half-serious. To most men there comes a time when they grow tired of readaptation and of looking forward. They speak of the past with a touch of regret, and the young feel that they are out of sympathy. There were no signs of this about our dear Bishop to the last. He was more hopeful than the youngest of us. He welcomed every new development, if only he was persuaded it was true development, and he waited for more. The Divine Spirit he believed in was a living Spirit, speaking and moving in the Church to-day, and he trusted every fresh age to add to the glory of God's revelation. And he expected God still to send messages through Samuel to Eli. 'You *must* see visions,' he said to one of his younger clergy—'I despair of you if you don't. Visions belong to youth; when you are older you will only dream dreams.'"[1]

I.

The Need of a New Covenant.

1. There had been many covenants—all of them ineffectual. God is said to have made a covenant with Noah, when He promised that a judgment like the flood should not be repeated; and with Abraham, when He promised Canaan to his descendants for an everlasting possession, and imposed the condition of circumcision. But by the phrase, "the Old Covenant," is meant especially the covenant which God made with Israel as a people on Mount Sinai. The writing called the "Book of the Covenant" comprised the Ten Commandments, and the body of laws which are recorded in the twenty-first and two following chapters of Exodus. These were the conditions imposed by God when He entered into covenant relations with Israel; and the solemn act by which this covenant was inaugurated is described in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus. Gathered at the base of the holy mountain, before an altar resting on twelve pillars, in honour of the twelve tribes, the people waited silent and awestruck, while twelve delegates (as yet there was no priesthood) offered such sacrifices as yet were possible, and while the lawgiver sprinkled the blood of the victims upon the assembled multitude. That ceremony had a latent meaning, unperceived at the time, which

[1] *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, ii. 371.

many centuries afterwards would be drawn out into the light under Apostolic direction; but the solemn character of the transaction was there and then profoundly felt. And at later periods of Israel's history this covenant was again and again renewed; as by Joshua at Shechem, by King Asa at Jerusalem, by Jehoiada the priest in the Temple, and also by the priesthood and people under Hezekiah, and under the auspices of Ezra and Nehemiah in later days still, after the great Captivity. It was renewed because it was continually broken. It was a Divine work, and yet, through man's perverseness, it was a failure. Hence the words, "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord."

¶ Jeremiah had played his part in establishing covenants between Israel and its God. He is not, indeed, even so much as mentioned in the account of Josiah's reformation; and it is not clear that he himself makes any express reference to it; so that some doubt must still be felt as to his share in that great movement. At the same time indirect evidence seems to afford proof of the common opinion that Jeremiah was active in the proceedings which resulted in the solemn engagement to observe the code of Deuteronomy. But yet another covenant occupies a chapter in the Book of Jeremiah, and in this case there is no doubt that the prophet was the prime mover in inducing the Jews to release their Hebrew slaves. This act of emancipation was adopted in obedience to an ordinance of Deuteronomy, so that Jeremiah's experience of former covenants was chiefly connected with the code of Deuteronomy and the older Book of the Covenant upon which it was based. The Restoration to which Jeremiah looked forward was to throw the Exodus into the shade, and to constitute a new epoch in the history of Israel more remarkable than the first settlement in Canaan. The nation was to be founded anew, and its regeneration would necessarily rest upon a New Covenant, which would supersede the Covenant of Sinai.[1]

¶ Oliver, we find, spoke much of "the Covenants"; which indeed are the grand axis of all, in that Puritan Universe of his. Two Covenants; one of Works, with fearful Judgment for our shortcomings therein; one of Grace and unspeakable mercy; —gracious Engagements, "Covenants," which the Eternal God has vouchsafed to make with His feeble creature, man. Two; and

[1] W. H. Bennett.

by Christ's Death they have become One: there for Oliver is the divine solution of this our Mystery of Life. "They were Two," he was heard ejaculating: "Two, but put into One before the Foundation of the World!" And again: "It is holy and true, it is holy and true, it is holy and true!—Who made it holy and true? The Mediator of the Covenant!" And again: "The Covenant is but One. Faith in the Covenant is my only support. And if I believe not, He abides faithful!" When his Children and Wife stood weeping round him, he said: "Love not this world. I say unto you, it is not good that you should love this world!" No. Children, live like Christians:—I leave you the Covenant to feed upon!"[1]

2. The Old Covenant had thus become, for practical purposes, an outworn safeguard. Israel in her successive generations had utterly failed to perform her part, and so had made it impossible for God to do what He had promised; until at length He loathed the people with whom He was in covenant, and rejected them, and cast them forth out of their land. What if all this should happen over again in the history of our children as it happened in the days of our fathers? Was such a result not all too likely? Such doubting thoughts were most natural to one in Jeremiah's position, and they constituted, we may be sure, one of his direst spiritual trials. But faith's trials are but the precursors of new triumphs. Job despairs of relief in the present life, and his very despair causes faith to reach out beyond the tomb in search of the deliverance which, in spite of all present appearances, it believes will surely come. Even so Jeremiah, justly despairing of permanent prosperity for Israel on the basis of the Old Covenant, by a sublime act of Heaven—inspired faith—dares to predict the advent of a time when the old discredited and bankrupt constitution or covenant shall be superseded by a new one furnished with conditions that shall insure it against failure.

¶ There follows the beautiful passage [in *The Ancient Sage*] in which the hopeful and wistful upward gaze of faith is described. While melancholy and perplexity constantly attend on the exercises of the speculative intellect, we are to "cling to faith":

> She reels not in the storm of warring words,
> She brightens at the clash of "Yes" and "No,"
> She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,

[1] Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, v. 151,

She feels the Sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain where they wail'd "Mirage"!

These lines present to the reader the hopefulness of the spiritual mind, hopefulness not akin to the merely sanguine temperament, but based on a deep conviction of the reality of the spiritual world, and on unfailing certainty that there is in it a key to the perplexities of this universe of which we men understand so little. We know from experience that material Nature is working out her ends, however little we understand the process, and however unpromising portions of her work might appear without this knowledge. That an acorn should have within it forces which compel earth, air, and water to come to its assistance and become the oak tree would seem incredible were it not so habitually known as a fact; and the certainty which such experiences give in the material order, the eye of faith gives in the spiritual order. However perplexing the universe now seems to us, we have this deep trust that there *is* an explanation, and that when we are in a position to judge the *whole*, instead of looking on from this corner of time and space, the truth of the spiritual interpretation of its phenomena will be clear—"ut iustificeris in sermonibus tuis et vincas cum iudicaris." This view runs through all the poem. The poet pleads for steadfast trust and hope in the face of difficulty, as we would trust a known and intimate friend in the face of ominous suspicions.[1]

And is the Great Cause lost beyond recall?
Have all the hopes of ages come to nought?
Is Life no more with noble meaning fraught?
Is Life but Death, and Love its funeral pall?
Maybe. But still on bended knees I fall,
Filled with a faith no preacher ever taught.
O God—*my* God, by no false prophet wrought,
I believe still, in despite of it all!

Let go the myths and creeds of groping men.
This clay knows nought—the Potter understands.
I own that Power divine beyond my ken,
And still can leave me in His shaping hands.
But, O my God, that madest me to feel!
Forgive the anguish of the turning wheel.[2]

[1] Wilfrid Ward, in *Tennyson and his Friends*, 236.
[2] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark*, 121.

II.

The Content of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant has three notes—Spirituality, Universality, and Finality. The formula of the Old Covenant was, "Thou shalt not." These great words, like a flash of lightning, discovered to man what lies in the depth of his own being—moral obligation along with a sense of utter impotence to meet it, darkness and despair as of chaos returning. The formula of the New Covenant is, "I will"; still greater words, which discover the heights above, as it were the body of heaven in its clearness, unruffled serenity and easy self-achievement of the grace of God. It would not be possible to represent what is characteristic in each dispensation more vividly than by these contrasted formulas. On the one side is a vain effort to attain, a strife between the law of the mind and the law of the members, a sense of hopeless duality that carries unrest—noble, if you will, but not less fatal—to the centre of man's being. On the other side is the rest of faith, a great reserve of spiritual power, the reconciliation of Divine ideals with the practice of human lives achieved by grace. Moral obligation persists under the gospel, but only as it is resolved into the higher freedom of the new life. As Pascal says, "The law demands what it cannot give; grace gives all it demands."

The fireguard serves a very necessary and beneficent purpose, but its real and ultimate worth lies in educating the child to do without it. So with the Mosaic law. It served its highest ends when it disciplined the soul to independence of it. The difference, therefore, between the Old Covenant and the New was not that one was ancient and the other modern; the mere "newness" was the least important thing about it. It was the difference between law and religion, between the letter of the one and the spirit of the other, between body and soul, between outward form and inward essence. The Old Covenant was imposed by an authority from without, whilst the New was established by an authority from within. One was graven on stone, and needed to be enforced by pains and penalties; the other was to be written in the heart as the glad, spontaneous expression of a free spirit.

1. *The New Covenant will be spiritual.*—The Old Covenant was formal, working from without inward, telling men what to do. This must come first. Childhood, of the race as of the individual, must begin life under rules. But the aim of the Law was to make itself superseded, by opening the way to a religious force which should work from within outward. A religion of forms, like an educational system, can never be closely personal. It cannot keep adjusting itself to the individual. It is machine work, not hand work. It fits only the average, and misfits everybody else. God's work is with the inner heart of each human being, where dwells his truest individuality, his real life. When this is gained, the whole is won. From it flow the upright conduct, the gentle manners, the broad benisons of regenerated society. Society is not a machine to which we may bring raw characters to make them virtuous, but the effluence and product of what individual characters bring to it. Nor will religion, or a church, or any clever society or institution within the church, turn out a new generation of new souls by its most perfect adjustments. The best of them is but a path, a hand, to bring men to God, an avenue by which God comes to them. Spirit with spirit is the method of salvation.

One cannot read the words, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," without thinking of the tables of stone which occupy so prominent a place in the history of the Sinaitic covenant. And the writing on the heart suggests very forcibly the defects of the ancient covenant, in so far as it had the fundamental laws of life written on *stone.* Writing on stone may be very durable. The slabs on which the Ten Words are inscribed may abide as a lasting monument, proclaiming what God requires of man, saying to successive generations: Remember to do this and to avoid doing that. But while the stone slabs may avail to keep men in mind of their duty, they are utterly impotent to dispose them to perform it; in witness whereof we need only refer to Israel's behaviour at the foot of the mount of lawgiving. At the very time the tables were being prepared, they danced around their golden calf; at the very moment Moses was descending with the two tables in his hand, with the Ten Words written on them, the first of which said, "Thou shalt have none other God before me," they had chosen

another God; insomuch that the legislator in disgust dashed the tables to pieces, as if to say, What is the use of making laws for such a people? Manifestly the writing on the heart is sorely wanted in order that the law may be kept, not merely in the ark, but in human conduct. And that, accordingly, is what Jeremiah puts in the forefront in his account of the New Covenant, on which restored Israel is to be constituted. How the mystic writing is to be achieved he does not say, perhaps he does not know; but he believes that God can and will achieve it somehow; and he understands full well its aim and its certain result in a holy life.

¶ You may adjust your social relationships according to the most democratic principle; you may define, in terms of economic science, the relations of Capital and Labour; you may abolish slums and build garden cities; but until there is drawn up and ratified between God and man, and between man and man, a new covenant of the spirit, your scheme for a new heaven and a new earth will never be realized. It is here that religion is indispensable, for no covenant will endure which ignores the spiritual nature of man. It is here that the voice of Jesus Christ may be heard, saying to capitalist and to workmen, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." It is here that the voice of the Redeemer may be heard saying to His Church, as He recalls it to a deeper appreciation of its character and mission: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do . . . in remembrance of me." This, surely, is our supreme business as Christians, to make this new covenant of the Spirit possible, by writing it on our own hearts, and afterwards to write it on the life and soul of our day.

Till earth becomes a temple,
  And every human heart
Shall join in one great service,
  Each happy in his part.
And God shall be our Master,
  And all His service own,
And men shall be as brothers,
  And heaven on earth be won.[1]

2. *Under the New Covenant knowledge of God will become universal.*—In ancient Israel as now, men learned what they could about God from human teachers. But the truths which

[1] E. J. Barson.

they learned, though inculcated with great industry, were, in the great majority of cases, not really mastered, because there was no accompanying process of interpretation and adjustment within the soul. It was to be otherwise in the future. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." In the New Covenant the Divine Teacher, without dispensing with such human instruments as were wanted, would do the most important part of His work Himself. He would make truth plain to the soul, and would enamour the soul of truth by such instruction as is beyond the reach of human argument and language, since it belongs to the world of spirit. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," said St. John to his readers, "and ye know all things." "Listen not," says St. Augustine, "too eagerly to the outward words: the Master is within."

No polemic against the priesthood is intended here. The prophet does not mean, with a stroke of his pen, to abolish an ancient Order to which he himself belongs. A much profounder idea underlies his words. He will have us distinguish between that knowledge of God which is esoteric and technical, the possession of a class, and that which is the instinct of every renewed nature, *i.e.*, between the ceremonial and the moral in religion. We shall never be in a position to claim independence of each other in our spiritual experience. It is "with all saints," *i.e.*, in the communion of the Catholic Church, that we come to know the love which passes knowledge. Moral sense must be trained; even conscience must be educated. But the education of conscience is one thing, and the imposition of creed or code is quite another. The one develops that individuality which the other tends to repress. The latter is excluded here. When he says, "They shall all know me," it is probable that the prophet does not consciously overlook the limits of his age. By "all men" he means all Jews. But the relative Universalism he asserts prepared for the absolute Universalism which is characteristic of the gospel age. Christianity is aggressive and world-subduing, because it is the religion not of the letter but of the spirit. English customs and ideals can hardly cross the Channel. They can no more take root in Eastern lands than the Mosaic Law

could domesticate itself in the West. But the law of Truth is nowhere from home; the thirst for God is part of the heritage of the race; and it is to these that the gospel makes its appeal. As a revelation of God to the soul of man, Christianity is the absolute Truth, the universal Faith.

The clearest mark of the new order of things, says Jeremiah, is that religion shall henceforth be taken at first hand. Jesus said, "Have salt *in yourselves*"; do not be dependent for what keeps life strong and wholesome on influences outside of you. The religion that is worth anything is not what is told you but what you know of yourself. This does not mean that there is no room for teaching. Paul's understanding of what is contained in Jesus Christ is rich and subtle, for Paul had a sure insight and a burning love. But if we know only what Paul says, and have no answering knowledge in ourselves, even Paul will help us little. A man may be a heretic in the truth, as Milton says; and "if he believes only because his pastor says so, or because the assembly so determines, without knowing other reasons, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy." It was proclaimed by Joel that God would one day pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh, even upon the servants and the handmaids; for it is God's intention in the covenant that nothing in station or in lack of education or opportunity should hinder any man from knowing God for himself. The motto of all our faith is, "With open face."

¶ It must be possible for men to know more of God, because the knowledge of God by man involves two elements, the known and the knower, God and man; and however perfectly God may have revealed Himself, man is but half developed and has only half possession of his knowing powers. The faith has been "once delivered to the saints," as Canaan was given to the Israelites. To "go in and possess the land" is still the duty of the Christian Israel. Who shall say how far it has been occupied in all these Christian centuries? We may be yet only at Jericho and Ai. Some most adventurous and earnest tribes may have pushed on to Bethel. Some very determined and aspiring souls may have climbed to the mountain-tops and even caught sight of the flashing sea which bounds the Promised Land upon the western side. However we may estimate the progress of the past, there still remains "very much land to be possessed." Surely the

trongest way to contend for the faith once delivered to the aints is to go forward reverently till the saints shall perfectly ossess the land and know all that it is possible for them to know f God and of His Book and of His ways.[1]

3. *The New Covenant will be permanent and final.*—"For I vill forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no nore." Under the Old Covenant, the provisions for the cancelling f sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the vorshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the roblem of guilt—of which no better evidence could be desired han the institution of the great day of atonement, in which a emembrance of sin was made once a year, and by which nothing nore than an annual and putative forgiveness was procured; under he New, on the contrary, God would grant to His people a real, bsolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation etween Him and them should be as if sin had never existed.

The trouble in every religious system that fails is that it loes not bring men close enough to what God really is, and there s no regenerating virtue in bowing before a formless mystery. There must be revelation, and the revelation of a heart. Jeremiah, eeling after things to come, says, It must be God who is to bridge his gulf, and He will do so by showing what He is. The new rder is to be inaugurated by a great act of forgiveness, in which ll the heart of God will appear. In some public way He will reat as His friends the men who have refused Him, putting them ll in His debt. Nothing short of that, as the prophet believed, vill get at the obdurate hearts of men; but at the touch of an nmerited forgiveness, gratitude will spring up within them, and ove—the power by which men know God and the constraint under vhich they are drawn willingly to obey Him. Forgiveness brings o erring men new conceptions of what their God is like—a God vho does not deal with His creatures on terms of strict, legal recision, but who pardons at His own cost, and gives them what hey have not worked for. And the very sight of such a God is real new birth, clearing and deepening all the faculties, and naking obedience easy.

Jeremiah hails here the coming of the religion of redemption. He dwells on what is the crowning glory of our faith. For what

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 226.

is it that is central in the New Testament? It is the cross of Jesus Christ. And why does that stand in the midst? It is because we have here the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. That death of the Son of God in our room and stead is the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for our sins. That indeed was only dimly and confusedly prefigured in the animal sacrifices of old. One is more struck with the difference than with the resemblance. A lamb led to the altar, unwillingly and unconsciously, is no adequate type of the Lamb of God offering Himself for us, taking upon Him our guilt, standing beneath the condemnation of our sins, and magnifying the justice of God in bowing His head beneath our sentence. The real precursors of Him who suffered on Calvary are to be found in those who gave themselves for their fellows, whose sacrifices did something to draw men nearer to God, and by whose stripes some of mankind's sorrows were healed. All stories, red with the blood of real life, that tell of the innocent suffering for the guilty, are a clearer foreshadowing of the old, old story of Jesus and His love than all animal sacrifices. The old religion had a temple in which sacrifices never ceased, but none of these atoned for sin with God. Christianity centres in the supreme self-sacrifice of the cross, by which we have been redeemed. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." This great blessing of pardon becomes ours because Christ has died for us. The gospel can dwell on the forgiveness of sins. It vindicates and fulfils the great promise, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."

¶ For the most part, we are, as it were, ready rather to steal forgiveness from God than to receive from him as one that gives it freely and largely. We take it up and lay it down as though we would be glad to have it, so God did not, as it were, see us take it; for we are afraid he is not willing we should have it indeed. We would steal this fire from heaven, and have a share in God's treasures and riches almost without his consent: at least, we think that we have it from him "ægrè," with much difficulty; that it is rarely given, and scarcely obtained; that he gives it out ἑκὼν ἀέκοντί γε θύμῳ, with a kind of *unwilling willingness*—as we sometimes give alms without cheerfulness; and that he loseth so much by us as he giveth out in pardon. We are apt to think that we are very willing to have forgiveness, but that God is unwilling to

bestow it, and that because he seems to be a loser by it, and to forego the glory of inflicting punishment for our sins; which of all things we suppose he is most loath to part withal. And this is the very nature of unbelief . . . Reason's line is too short to fathom the depth of the Father's love, of the blood of the Son, and the promises of the gospel built thereon, wherein forgiveness dwells.[1]

Contrite to God I came in sore distress,
"I know," I cried, "that 'twas but yester-eve
This self-same fault I asked Thee to forgive,
And promised to renounce all sinfulness.
Yet I would even ask again Thy grace,
Save that I fear I've drained forgiveness dry
And reached Thy mercy's utmost boundary!"
Then spake God's mighty Voice, and filled the place:
"With thy poor human tape, child, dost thou think
To measure My vast mercy's outer bound?
With thy short plummet at Forgiveness' brink,
Dost think that thou can'st test its depth of ground?
Drop in thy weightiest sin, and bid it sink,
To strike the bottom—there comes back no sound."

[1] John Owen, *An Exposition upon Psalm cxxx.*

The Discipline of Change.

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The Discipline of Change.

Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed. —Jer. xlviii. 11.

Jeremiah, in levelling this indictment against Moab, throws his accusation into figures of speech which every Moabite would understand, because they were drawn from the industry most closely related to the life of that country. The process was a simple one. The wine-juice was strained out into a great vessel, and there allowed to stand until the lees—the dregs—settled at the bottom. Then it was emptied to another vessel, and other impurities were allowed to settle, and again it was strained off. This process was repeated many times until the wine-juice was perfectly pure and clear. The virtue of the wine depended entirely on this emptying from vessel to vessel. If the juice were allowed to stagnate, and remain settled on its lees, it would inevitably grow sour. Something of the contamination of the dregs would be communicated to the wine. The dregs would never be disposed of, and the purification would never be achieved. To the eye of the prophet, here is a picture of the life of the Moabites. It is a life of stagnation and consequent defilement. They have not hearkened to the truths uttered in their hearing through the processes of their principal manufacture. Ignoble and ignominious ease, with its consequent lethargy and indolence, has produced staleness. There is no virtue left in the life of Moab. He has become wholly selfish and averse to taking trouble or facing a sacrificial life. He has not been emptied from vessel to vessel. He has ceased even to be interesting. He has no gifts for the world; he has no satisfaction for his own people. "His taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed."

¶ Jeremiah applies to nations the dictum of Polonius—

Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits,

and apparently suggests that ruin and captivity were necessary elements in the national discipline of Moab—

"Moab hath been undisturbed from his youth;
He hath settled on his lees;
He hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel;
He hath not gone into captivity:
Therefore his taste remaineth in him,
His scent is not changed.
Wherefore, behold, the days come—it is the utterance of Jehovah—
That I will send men unto him that shall tilt him up;
They shall empty his vessels and break his bottles."

As the chapter, in its present form, concludes with a note—

"I will bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days—it is the utterance of Jehovah"—

we gather that even this rough handling was disciplinary; at any-rate, the former lack of such vicissitudes had been to the serious detriment of Moab. It is strange that Jeremiah did not apply this principle to Judah. For, indeed, the religion of Israel and of mankind owes an incalculable debt to the captivity of Judah, a debt which later writers are not slow to recognize. "Behold," says the prophet of the Exile—

"I have refined thee, but not as silver;
I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."[1]

I.

Life's Changes.

The text depicts in vivid imagery an undisturbed and easy life, with the natural penalty that overtakes it.

1. The kingdom of Moab had long enjoyed tranquillity, though there were troublesome neighbours near, and though it was a

[1] W. H. Bennett.

state of no great power; it had pleased God to order it so. Moab had "been at ease from his youth." Moab had not been subjected to captivity or to other changes and troubles which are to a nation what pouring from one vessel to another is to wine. He had not been tried with processes which might indeed have been painful, but in which he would have got rid of a good deal of the evil that was in him at the first. Moab had been secure in prosperity; and so he had remained the same as at the beginning —all his bad qualities being only confirmed by time and use. If Jeremiah had put into modern phrase his indictment of Moab, he would not have said the Moabite was devoid of the military spirit; he would have judged him void of the civic spirit, which is just the religious spirit in activity. He would have called him low-spirited because he was not high-minded. He would have arraigned him at the bar of Time because he gave to the senses what he would not give to the soul. He would have called on us to behold the doom of self-indulgence and the culpable fate of luxury and ease.

¶ Luxury was one of Bishop Fraser's deepest aversions. He saw clearly the demoralization caused by luxury, and, both in word and act, he set his face steadfastly against luxury in every form. He delighted in bounty, in refinement, in elegance, but he simply hated all vulgarity of display. His estimation of things was fixed not by their market-value, but by their intrinsic worth. He preferred to take a dish of tea with a poor curate who was unselfishly struggling amid poverty to elevate his flock, than to dine off gold plate with a self-indulgent, extravagant millionaire. Upon one occasion he said:

"I never visit the Peel Park at Manchester without thinking what an amount of wisdom there is in the few words inscribed on the statue of Mr. Joseph Brotherton, who had been member for Salford—'My wealth consisted not in the largeness of my means, but in the fewness of my wants.' I am quite certain there is no system of life more likely to lead to disappointment than to surround ourselves with things which, to begin with, are luxuries, but soon get to be necessities. Many of us have been so long in the habit of surrounding ourselves with luxuries that if we were deprived of them we should think we were actually suffering a wrong, although perhaps twenty years ago they were luxuries beyond our reach, even in our wildest dreams."[1]

[1] J. W. Diggle, *The Lancashire Life of Bishop Fraser*, 17.

2. The life of Israel was a singular contrast to that of Moab. The Hebrews had never been allowed to remain long undisturbed. Their very exodus from Egypt only resulted at first in their wanderings through the wilderness; and even after they had received possession of the Land of Promise they had no immunity from unsettlement. Indeed their entire national history is almost a perpetual alternation between prosperity and disturbance. At one time they groaned under the yoke of some oppressor; at another they rejoiced in the deliverance which, by the instrumentality of some "mighty man of valour," the Lord had wrought for them. Under one king they delighted in the blessings of peace; under another they endured all the agonies of war. In one age they passed through the crisis of a revolution which rent the kingdom in twain; in another they were subjected to all the discomfort and humiliation of exile. Thus they were "emptied from vessel to vessel," and so we account for the fact that, in the main, they grew in all the qualities which give greatness to nations, and were at last completely purified from the "lees" of that idolatry which had so long tainted them in the sight of God.

¶ Similar contrasts might be instanced among the states and nations of our own time; in China, for example, and England; one standing motionless for long ages, and becoming an effete civilization, absolutely hopeless as regards the promise of a regenerated future; the other emptied from vessel to vessel, four times conquered, three times deluged with civil war, converted, reformed and reformed in religion, and finally emerging, after more than one change of dynasty, into a state of law, liberty, intelligence, and genuinely Christian manhood, to be one of the foremost and mightiest nations of the world.[1]

3. Discipline is essential, if we are to be effectually loosened from our own evils, and prepared to do the will and work of God, and indeed it seems to be a law in every sort of business or trade that nothing shall stand on its lees. The very scheme of life appears to be itself a grand decanting process, where change follows change, and all are emptied from vessel to vessel. Here and there a man, like Moab, stands upon his lees, and commonly with the same result. Fire, flood, famine, sickness in all forms and guises,

[1] H. Bushnell, *The New Life* (1860), 293.

wait upon us, seen or unseen, and we run the gauntlet through them, calling it life. And the design appears to be to turn us hither and thither, allowing us no chance to stagnate in any sort of benefit or security.

(1) Our chequered experiences have a wonderful power of cleansing our view and revealing us to ourselves. Too often we are ignorant of the plague of our own hearts until, under some such afflictive visitation, we are led to examine ourselves, and to say with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." The evil may have been of long standing, and yet, because of its blunting influence on the conscience, we may have been unaware of its existence until the fiery trial brought it into view. Sudden emergency is a sure opener of a man's eyes to his own defects. He may contrive to get on, in seasons of prosperity and outward calm, without becoming conscious of the weak points of his character; but let him be thrown, all at once, upon his own resources by the coming upon him of some crushing calamity, and he will then find out whether he has that within him which can stand the strain that has been put upon him. It was a shrewd remark of Andrew Fuller that "a man has only as much religion as he can command in the day of trial"; and if he have no religion at all, his trouble will make that manifest to him.

¶ Just as the strain of the storm tells where the ship is weakest, and stirs up the mariner to have it strengthened there, so the pressure of trial reveals the defects of character which still adhere to the Christian. One affliction may disclose an infirmity of temper; another may discover a weakness of faith; a third may make it evident that the power of some old habit is not yet entirely broken; and thus, from this constant revelation to him of the evils that still remain in him, he is led, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to the attainment of a higher measure of holiness than otherwise he could have reached. Paradoxical as it may appear, the occurrence of a railway accident now and then has led to most of the improvements in railway travelling, because it has directed attention to the weak places and evoked immediate effort to prevent the recurrence of the evil. Now much in the same way our spiritual "breaks-down" under the unsettlements of God's providence make manifest to us the deficiencies of our souls.[1]

(2) A radical change in our circumstances is sometimes

[1] W. M. Taylor, *The Limitations of Life*, 363.

necessary to break down our self-will. Sin is but another name for self-direction. We cast off the will of God in it, and set up for a way and for objects of our own. We devise plans to serve ourselves, and we mean to carry them straight through to their result. Whatever crosses us, or turns us aside, or in any way forbids us to do or succeed just as we like, becomes our annoyance. And these kinds of annoyance are so many and subtle and various that the very world seems to be contrived to baffle us. In one view it is. It would not be good for us, having cast off the will of God, and set up our own will, to let us get on smoothly and never feel any friction or collision with the will cast off. Therefore God manages to turn us about, beat us back, empty us from vessel to vessel, and make us feel that our bad will is hedged about, after all, by His almighty purposes. Sometimes we seem to bend, sometimes to break. Be it one or the other, we lost a part of our stiffness. By and by, to avoid breaking, we consent to bend, and so at last become more flexible to God, falling into a habit of letting go, then of consent, then of contrition. The coarse and bitter flavour of our self-will is reduced in this manner, and gradually fined away. If we could stand on our lees, in continual peace and serenity, if success were made secure, subject to no change or surprise, what, on the other hand, should we do more certainly than stay by our evil mind, and take it as a matter of course that our will is to be done; the very thing above all others of which we most need to be cured?

¶ As the wine standing on its dregs or lees contracts a taste from the lees, and must therefore be decanted or drawn off, so as to have no contact longer with their vile sedimentary matter, so we, in like manner, need to be separated from everything pertaining to the former life, to be broken up in our expectations, and loosened from the affinities of our former habit. In our conversion to God we pass a crisis that, like fermentation, clears our transparency and makes us apparently new; we are called new men in Christ Jesus; still the old man is not wholly removed. It settles like dregs at the bottom, so to speak, of our character, where it is, for the present, unseen. One might imagine, for the time, that it is wholly taken away; and yet it is there, and is only the more likely to infect us that it is not sufficiently mixed with our life to cloud our present transparency. Our sanctification is not to be completed save by separation from it. And therefore God,

who is faithful to us, continues to sever us, as completely as possible, from all association with the old life and condition; breaks up our plans, compels a readjustment of our objects, empties us about from vessel to vessel, that our taste may not remain.[1]

(3) It is in the changes and surprises through which we are continually passing that we are prepared for the gracious and refining work of the Spirit in us. When we are allowed to stand still, and are agitated by no changes, we become incrusted, as it were, under our remaining faults or evils, and shut up in them as wine in the vat where it is kept. And the Spirit of God is shut away, in this manner, by the imperviousness of our settled habit. But when great changes or calamities come, our crust is broken up, and the freshening breath of the Spirit fans the open chamber of the soul, to purify it. Now the prayer, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults," finds an answer which before was impossible. Providence, in this view, is an agitating Power to break the incrustations of evil, and let the gales of the Spirit blow where they list in us. Under some great calamity or sorrow, the loss of a child, the visitations of bodily pain, a failure in business, the slanders of an enemy, a persecution for the truth or for righteousness' sake, how tender and open to God does the soul become! "Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me," is now the ingenuous prayer, and the Spirit of God comes in to work the answer, finding everything ready for an effectual and thorough purgation. And so, by a double process, Providence and the Spirit both in unity (for God is always one with Himself), we are perfected in holiness and finished in the complete beauty of Christ.

¶ "Joy is a duty" was her inspiring motto. And the following quotation admirably expresses what she had discovered, both for herself and others, of the blessing concealed in suffering:—

"Often when I am carving a block of marble," said a sculptor one day, "and when I see the chips flying in all directions, I feel a kind of compassion for the stone, and I try to comfort it by saying, 'Yes, I am wounding and hurting you now, but my purpose is to fashion you into a thing of eternal beauty.' There is One who is a greater Sculptor than I, greater than Michael

[1] H. Bushnell, *The New Life*, 298.

Angelo, or Phidias—God. Humanity is His marble . . . pain is His chisel . . . and when I pass through suffering, and see the way in which sorrow shatters my most lovely dreams, I softly murmur, 'God Himself is at work in my soul, and in His infinite mercy He is about to enrich and deepen my life far beyond my own imaginings! I thank Thee, my God!'"[1]

(4) These frequent unsettlements have a tendency to keep us from being wedded to the world, or from thinking of rooting ourselves permanently here. Johnson was not wrong when he said, "Whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present exalts us in the dignity of thinking beings." That is precisely what frequent unsettlements in the present life, taken in connexion with his belief in the revelation of heaven's blessedness, do tend to in the Christian. Therefore, they cannot but have a holy power on the character of the man who views them in that connexion. The more attractive heaven becomes to us the more shall we seek in the present to cultivate the heavenly spirit. To be weaned from earth is one of the means of making us seek our spiritual food from heaven; and the trials of earth, transplanting us from place to place and from plan to plan, tend to prepare us for the great transplanting which is to take us from this world altogether, and root us in the garden of the Lord above.

¶ Some years ago, while I was rambling with a friend in the neighbourhood of the English Windermere, we came upon a house which was surrounded by the most beautiful shrubs I ever saw, and I was naturally led to make some inquiry concerning them. My companion, who lived in the locality, informed me that, by a judicious system of transplanting, constantly pursued, the proprietor was able to bring them to the highest perfection. I am not horticulturist enough to know whether that would produce such a result or not, but when I heard the statement I thought at once of the manner in which God, by continuous transplanting, keeps His people fresh and beautiful, and prevents them from becoming too closely attached to the world. Its possessions are taken from them. Its friends prove faithless to them. Its relationships are broken for them. Its joys give way in their experience to sorrows. And all this is to keep them from becoming wedded to the present life.[2]

[1] *A Living Witness: The Life of Adèle Kamm* (1914), 115.
[2] W. M. Taylor, *The Limitations of Life*, 367.

I would not ask Thee that my days
Should flow quite smoothly on and on:
Lest I should learn to love the world
Too well, ere all my time was done.

I would not ask Thee that my work
Should never bring me pain nor fear;
Lest I should learn to work alone,
And never wish Thy presence near.

I would not ask Thee that my friends
Should always kind and constant be;
Lest I should learn to lay my faith
In them alone and not in Thee.

But I would ask Thee still to give,
By night my sleep—by day my bread,
And that the counsel of Thy Word,
Should shine and show the path to tread.

And I would ask a humble heart,
A changeless will to work and wake,
A firm faith in Thy Providence,
The rest—'tis Thine to give or take.[1]

II.

The Penalty of Stagnation.

1. This sterile, stagnant Moab, the good wine of whose life is vitiated by inaction and indolence, is surely the text for a thousand sermons. There are sins to which God shows no mercy; and this is one. Other sins do seem for a while to succeed. This one is always obviously fatal. Is there anything more pitiable than a people of fine possibilities sunk in moral degeneracy and decay? Nothing can live on these terms. These are the peoples who sink and soak in vice, whose brain-power withers, whose physique suffers, whose liberties and rights decay, whose whole social organization is full of rottenness and disease.

¶ The great Oriental empires, Assyria and Babylon and Persia,

[1] Alfred Norris.

uropean empires like Rome and Spain, took their rightful place
f ascendancy through toil and struggle; then rotted at the heart,
nothered by success, and shrivelled at a touch of God's east
ind. Plutarch, in his life of Alexander the Great, describes how
e and his Macedonian troops became lax and flaccid amid the
ealth and riot made possible by their wonderful victories.
lexander himself, from the extreme temperance and control of
is youth, became self-indulgent, was sometimes almost mad with
ine, and died of a carousal. The once hardy soldiers became
issolute and riotous, and the huge fabric of his empire crumbled
own into dust.[1]

¶ Hawthorne's dream of a railroad to the Celestial City ended
ı disillusion. Mr. Smooth-the-way, the conductor, showed him-
elf at the last in fiend's form; and the engine-driver was none
ther than Apollyon, who would deceive you into the belief that
ou can escape the fatigues and perils of the pilgrimage. The
nmortal garland, says Milton, is to be won not without dust and
eat. There is no experience to be gained otherwise, no real
eauty of Christian faith and character. Your taste will remain
ı you, and your scent be not changed. But if God has His will
nd His way with us, He will do His work of progress, of purifica-
ion, till at the last He who is at once the Vine and the Vintner
hall present the fruit of His vineyard—the wine of our faith and
ove—to the lips of His Father in the Kingdom of the redeemed.[2]

2. But even for the stagnant nation Jeremiah has a message
f hope. Moab cannot save himself by the sword. He settled
n his lees. He purged himself of none of the evils that were in
is midst. He grew lewd, drunken, boastful, mammon-serving,
leasure-hunting; and in his fall he uttered in the ear of the
orld the tragic cry of a victim to the softer vices of an enervated
nd demoralized generation. How, then, is Moab to recover his
oul, his purity, his character, his tone and flavour as a people?
[e must be emptied from vessel to vessel. He must be visited
y the Eternal Vintner, who will not spare him either the crush-
ıg of his grapes or the agitation by which his wine is to be
larified. The God over all is too wise to err, too good to be
nkind, and the last unkindness would be to leave Moab to
tagnate, settled upon his lees. Here is an interpreter who can
econcile cataclysms and upheavals and catastrophes with the
rocess necessary to produce the higher order. To him the

[1] Hugh Black, *Comfort*, 73. [2] C. Silvester Horne.

seeming cruelty of Moab's fate is actual kindness to Moab's soul. What people call the "malice of events" is the mercy of Providence. Moab in the hands of his enemy is Moab in the hands of God.

There are tears in this man's heart for Moab, and they drop upon his pages. Noble words are here, not of vindictive hatred, but of human-hearted compassion for even merited suffering. Even while he sees that it is pride that has done it, contempt of God's will, which is the same for all nations, he pays his tribute of humanity. This broken people moves him to honourable sorrow. Their military pride is humbled to the dust. "They shall howl, saying, How is it broken down! how hath Moab turned the back with shame!" Yet there is a possible way back out of captivity, for this breaking of the vessels and emptying of the wine is the one and only method of Moab's redemption. This visitation may even yet be the salvation of a people.

¶ When I tell you that war is the foundation of all the arts, I mean also that it is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men.

It is very strange to me to discover this; and very dreadful—but I saw it to be quite an undeniable fact. The common notion that peace and the virtues of civil life flourished together, I found to be wholly untenable. Peace and the vices of civil life only flourish together. We talk of peace and learning, and of peace and plenty, and of peace and civilization, but I found that those were not the words which the Muse of History coupled together; that, on her lips, the words were—peace and sensuality—peace and selfishness—peace and death. I found, in brief, that all great nations learned their truth of word, and strength of thought, in war; that they were nourished in war, and wasted by peace; taught by war, and deceived by peace; trained by war, and betrayed by peace—in a word, that they were born in war, and expired in peace.

Yet now note carefully, in the second place, it is not *all* war of which this can be said—nor all dragon's teeth, which, sown, will start up into men. It is not the rage of a barbarian wolf-flock, as under Genseric or Suwarrow; nor the habitual restlessness and rapine of mountaineers, as on the old borders of Scotland; nor the occasional struggle of a strong peaceful nation for its life, as in the wars of the Swiss with Austria; nor the contest of merely ambitious nations for extent of power, as in the wars of France under Napoleon, or the just terminated war in

America. None of these forms of war build anything but tombs. But the creative, or foundational, war is that in which the natural restlessness and love of contest among men are disciplined, by consent, into modes of beautiful—though it may be fatal—play: in which the natural ambition and love of power of men are disciplined into the aggressive conquest of surrounding evil; and in which the natural instincts of self-defence are sanctified by the nobleness of the institutions, and purity of the households which they are appointed to defend. To such war as this all men are born; in such war as this any man may happily die; and out of such war as this have arisen, throughout the extent of past ages, all the highest sanctities and virtues of humanity.[1]

3. That which is true of nations is true of men. There are other passages of Holy Scripture which help us to the spiritual meaning of all this statement concerning Moab. Says the Psalmist, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." And in the book of the prophet Zephaniah we read, "It shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." Now the great lesson from all this is, that there is spiritual danger in the quiet lot, and in the quiet heart; that it is not God's purpose that those He loves should enjoy entire worldly tranquillity; that there is something good in care, unrest, disquiet, sorrow, bereavement, disappointment, perplexity—in all that breaks up that perilous calm in which we grow too well satisfied with this world and feel ourselves too little dependent on our Saviour and our Comforter, and in which we come too much to feel as if things went on in their way forgetting that God directs them all, and fail to realize that the one thing needful is something quite different from worldly enjoyment or worldly gain.

¶ Staying for a while in the valley of Aosta, in Northern Italy, we found the air to be heavy, close, and humid with pestiential exhalations. We were oppressed and feverish—one's life did not seem worth a pin. We could not breathe freely, our lungs had a sense of having a hundred atmospheres piled upon them. Presently, at midday, there came a thunder-clap, attended by big drops of rain, and a stiff gale of wind, which grew into a perfect

[1] Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, § 93 (*Works*, xviii. 464).

tornado, tearing down the trees; then followed what the poet calls "sonorous hail," and then again the lightning flash, and the thunder peal on peal echoing along the Alps. But how delightful was the effect, how we all went out upon the verandah to look at the lightning, and enjoy the music of the thunder! How cool the air and bracing! How delightful to walk out in the cool evening after the storm! Then you could breathe and feel a joy in life. Full often it is thus with the Christian after trouble. He has grown to be careless, lethargic, feverish, heavy, and ready to die, and just then he has been assailed by trouble, thundering threatenings have rolled from God's mouth, flashes of lightning have darted from providence: the property vanished, the wife died, the children were buried, trouble followed trouble, and then the man has turned to God, and though his face was wet with tears of repentance, yet he has felt his spirit to be remarkably restored. When he goes up to the house of God it is far more sweet to hear the word than aforetime. He could not pray before, but now he leans his head on Jesus' bosom and pours out his soul in fellowship.[1]

Light human nature is too lightly tost
And ruffled without cause,—complaining on,
Restless with rest—until, being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
Or a small wasp have crept to the innermost
Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun
Shine westward of our window,—straight we run
A furlong's sigh, as if the world were lost.
But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us,—we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Aye, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear, submissive, o'er the stormy main,
God's chartered judgements walk for evermore.[2]

[1] C. H. Spurgeon. [2] E. B. Browning, *Sonnets.*

The Perfection of Sorrow.

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The Perfection of Sorrow.

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be ıy sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me.—Lam. i. 12.

, These words take us back to a time nearly six hundred years efore Christ, when Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of the ɔnquering Chaldæans. There is no ode or elegy in literature ıore pathetic or more tragic than this Hebrew poet's wail over is desolate city. It gives expression to feelings which must have ɨirred many a patriotic Hebrew heart in those dark and troubled ays. "Solitary lieth the city, she that was full of people, she hat was great among the nations, a princess among provinces. ɨion's ways do languish, her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, er virgins are afflicted, all her friends have betrayed her and she ı in bitterness." In the text Jerusalem herself is represented s plunged in the lowest depths of despair and as appealing for ympathy and help. She appeals first to passing travellers, then ɔ the larger circle of the surrounding nations, and lastly to her ɨod. Already the suffering city has spoken once or twice in rief interruptions of the poet's descriptions of her miseries, and ow she seems to be too impatient to permit herself to be repre-ɛnted any longer even by this friendly advocate; she must come ɔrward in person and present her case in her own words, "Is it othing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be ıy sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me."

2. The appeal to all who pass by is most familiar to us in its ıter association with our Lord's sufferings on the cross. But this ı not in any sense a Messianic passage; it is confined in its urpose to the miseries of Jerusalem. Of course there can be no bjection to illustrating the grief and pain of the Man of Sorrows y using the classic language of an ancient lament if we note that ıis is only an illustration. There is a kinship in all suffering,

and it is right to consider that He who was tried in all points a we are tried passed through sorrows which absorbed all the bitter ness even of such a cup of woe as that which was drunk b Jerusalem in the extremity of her misfortunes. If never befor there had been sorrow like unto her sorrow, at length that wa matched, nay, surpassed, at Gethsemane and Golgotha. Whe He who was "holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners" cam into direct relation with sin, He suffered as it is not possible fo us to realize. To our Lord, the sin around Him was that fron which His nature, and His intense loyalty to His Father i heaven, shrank with unspeakable pain. In its climax we ca even see how it led to an actual sense of separation from God for when sin, in its hate of Him, hung Him up as a "curse thing" upon the cross, as malefactor, outlaw, and outcast, i pictured forth its own deadly power to kill the representativ of the race, sinless though He was. And the silent heave seemed to the breaking heart of the Christ as the hiding awa of the Face of Eternal Love, who in that dark hour knew grief which we understand not, while "he spared not his ow Son."

¶ In one of the best and most widely known hymns o the crucifixion of Jesus—Isaac Watts' "When I survey th wondrous Cross"—attention is concentrated upon that pitifu spectacle of suffering, and a challenge is thrown out. The vers reads—

> See from His head, His hands, His feet,
> Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
> Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
> Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Those were almost the last words of Matthew Arnold, who die suddenly in Liverpool of heart failure on Sunday, April 15, 188 when on his way to the Landing Stage to meet his daughte returning from America. He had attended Ian Maclaren's churc in the morning, and after service he was heard repeating to him self the words of the hymn which had been sung by the congrega tion. The hymn had evidently impressed him—and yet, Hellenis as he was, and typical man of culture, he felt the spell and th power of that awful tragedy in comparison with which all othe tragedies pale.[1]

[1] Thomas Sanderson, *Unfulfilled Designs*, 72.

I know as I know my life,
I know as I know my pain,
That there is no lonely strife,
That he is mad who would gain
A separate balm for his woe,
A single pity and cover;
The one great God I know
Hears the same prayer over and over.

I know it, because at the portal
Of heaven, I bowed and cried,
And I said: "Was ever a mortal
Thus crowned and crucified!
My praise thou hast made my blame;
My best thou hast made my worst;
My good thou hast turned to shame;
My drink is a flaming thirst."

But scarce my prayer was said
Ere from that place I turned;
I trembled, I hung my head,
My cheek, shame-smitten, burned;
For there where I bowed down
In my boastful agony,
I thought of Thy cross and crown—
O Christ, I remembered Thee.[1]

I.

1. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This title, from the well-known, marvellous fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which tells of the "suffering Servant of Jehovah," has been applied by universal consent of the Christian ages to the Son of God—the Christ who lived on this earth for men, and died broken-hearted through their sin. When did our Lord begin to realize that His earthly career was to be one of sorrow? We do not know. We should certainly like to think of His childhood as having been happy. Indeed it must have been so: for they alone are happy who are innocent, and the childhood of Jesus was altogether sinless. His very presence in that humble home at Nazareth must have made it happy; and when He Himself looked back

[1] R. W. Gilder, *Five Books of Song.*

afterwards upon His childhood, that season of His life must have seemed to Him like a dream of peace and love. Although we cannot tell at what period our blessed Lord had His first experience of heavy sorrow, or His earliest prevision of the cross, we know that when He was only twelve years of age He had already become alive to the singularity of His relationship to God. And we have evidence also that almost at the very beginning of His public ministry He knew that He was to be crucified for the world's sin; for He spoke of that to Nicodemus and He had referred to it even earlier (John ii. 19, iii. 14). The solemn event must have been foreknown to Him before His ministry began, even before He had left the home of His youth at Nazareth.

¶ The answer of Jesus ("Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?") to the reproachful question of His mother (in Luke ii. 48) lays bare His childhood's mind, and for a moment affords a wide glance over the thoughts which used to engross Him in the fields of Nazareth. It shows that already, though so young, He had risen above the great mass of men, who drift on through life without once inquiring what may be its meaning and its end. He was aware that He had a God-appointed life-work to do, which it was the one business of His existence to accomplish. It was the passionate thought of all His after-life. It ought to be the first and last thought of every life. It recurred again and again in His later sayings, and pealed itself finally forth in the word with which He closed His career—It is finished!

It has often been asked whether Jesus knew all along that He was the Messiah, and, if not, when and how the knowledge dawned upon Him—whether it was suggested by hearing from His mother the story of His birth or announced to Him from within. Did it dawn upon Him all at once, or gradually? When did the plan of His career, which He carried out so unhesitatingly from the beginning of His ministry, shape itself in His mind? Was it the slow result of years of reflection, or did it come to Him at once? These questions have occupied the greatest Christian minds and received very various answers. I will not venture to answer them, and especially with His reply to His mother before me, I cannot trust myself even to think of a time when He did not know what His work in this world was to be.[1]

2. What did the sorrow of Christ consist in? Physical pain formed one of its ingredients; but we should not allow our minds

[1] J. Stalker, *The Life of Jesus Christ*, 23.

to dwell too much upon that. It is a stupendous mistake to enlarge so much as some poets and painters and emotional pulpit rhetoricians have done upon the mere physical accompaniments of the death of Jesus Christ—the crown of thorns, the Roman scourging, the pierced hands and feet. It is true that the Roman scourging (which, it will be remembered, was inflicted more than once upon the Apostle Paul) was one of the most terrible tortures ever invented by the cruelty of man; and crucifixion was a most agonizing and lingering method of killing. The agony in the garden was appalling; but we have our Lord's own testimony when He was enduring it that it was not merely or chiefly physical pain that bowed Him to the ground. His words were, "My *soul* is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." And we cannot believe that His mind and heart were overwhelmed simply by the fear of crucifixion. Peter and others of the disciples of our Lord have been crucified, and have suffered greater physical torture, in the form of punishment, than the Blessed One Himself; for in His case the end came sooner than usual, and the authorities were astonished to discover that He was so soon dead. We know that Socrates, the Athenian philosopher, faced his martyrdom with perfect composure, and declined to avail himself of the escape from prison which his friends had planned. We know also that a multitude of Christian martyrs have with sublime fortitude given their bodies to be burned, and have confessed, amidst their dying agonies, that they received from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself the strength which enabled them to endure. No one of the four Evangelists lays any emphasis upon the bodily sufferings of Jesus. They say little of the physical pains of Christ; and Nature drew a veil over the face of the sun during His last agony. How irreverent it is of any man to try to snatch that veil away and let in the vulgar glare of day upon the agony of Christ! To dwell upon the details of His physical sufferings is to divert the thoughts of men from the main source and character of His sufferings.

¶ Every suggestion of the unseen is precious, every door opening into it. And ah! Protestant as I am, even image-worship does appeal to a part of man's nature. There is an old stone of granite by the roadside, as you wind up the hill at old Buda, upon which a worn and defaced image of our Saviour is cut, which

I used often to pass. Below the granite block are the words (from the Vulgate version of Lamentations i. 12)—"O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est ullus dolor sicut dolor meus." The thorough woe-begoneness of that image used to haunt me long: that old bit of granite—the beau-ideal of human sorrow, weakness, and woe-begoneness. To this day it will come back upon me, and always with that dumb gaze of perfect calmness—no complaining—the picture of meek and mute suffering. The memory of it comes up fresh as when I first looked upon it.[1]

II.

1. The necessity of sorrow in the life of Christ came from the spiritual character of His work. From the point of view of the disciples, and the popular conception of the Messiah, a certain amount of conflict and hardship could readily be allowed for. The Roman could not be expected to yield without a blow; and as it became clear that opposition from within His own nation was to be expected, temporary disappointments and misunderstandings would fall within the disciples' scheme of the future. They were ready for the hardships of an earthly struggle, *i.e.*, to drink His cup as they understood it. They were not prepared for the cross, because they had not a deep enough conception of His work. Not Roman or Sadducee, but sin, was the enemy; Christ's aim was the establishment of a spiritual and universal empire. The national mission of the Son of David had passed into the world-wide mission of the Servant of Jehovah, and the means which might have sufficed for the one would no longer serve the other. His work moved on a higher plane, and the weapons of His warfare must be more mysterious and spiritual than any outward miracle. These weapons were the attractive and atoning power of service and sorrow. The cross, the life of service, and all it implied of sorrow and suffering, were necessary because He had come to give His life a ransom for many.

¶ It was with a great rush of emotion that Jesus first announced the coming of the kingdom. His message was emphatically the "Gospel" of the kingdom of God. He commenced, like John, with announcing simply that the kingdom was at hand; and there is no reason to doubt that there existed in the

[1] "Rabbi" Duncan, in *Colloquia Peripatetica*, 41.

public mind a sufficient amount of Messianic sentiment to make this announcement attract attention and excite enthusiasm. At first everyone would interpret it according to his own ideas of the expected kingdom; and so the rumour of the preaching of John and Jesus rang through the land, and all men were in expectation as to the shape in which the promised kingdom would appear.

As soon, however, as Jesus began to explain Himself, it became manifest that the majority of His countrymen and He were expecting the fulfilment of the promise in totally different forms. Both employed the same phrase—"the kingdom of God"—but His countrymen laid the emphasis on the first half of it—"the kingdom"—while He laid it on the second—"of God." They were thinking of the external benefits and glories of a kingdom, such as political emancipation, a throne, a court, a capital and tributary provinces, while He was thinking of the character of the subjects of the anticipated realm and of the doing in it of the will of God as it is done in heaven.

Browning, in the opening pages of *The Ring and the Book*, compares the poet's art to that of the goldsmith, who, when he is working with the finest gold, has to make use of an alloy, in order to give the precious metal sufficient consistency to enable it to stand the action of his tools and assume the shapes which he desires. But, when the form is complete, he applies an acid, which evaporates the alloy and leaves nothing but the pure gold of the perfect ring. The popular conception of the kingdom of God was the alloy with which Jesus had to mix His teaching, in order to make it fit to mingle with the actual life of the world of His day. Without it His thought would have been too ethereal and too remote from the living hopes of men. He had to take men where He found them, and lead them step by step to the full appreciation of His sublime purpose for the world. He was not to be the king of the Jews, but King of an infinitely diviner realm; yet it was by aiming at the throne which He missed that He reached the throne which He now occupies.[1]

2. Again, His sorrow was the clue to His loneliness. See Him looking from afar over the city of David, the home of His race, the centre of its history and of its religion, the city and the temple that He loved. His soul is melted to tears, as He thinks of her bygone works and of the destiny that awaits her.

[1] J. Stalker, *The Christology of Jesus*, 146, 163.

"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Rejected in Galilee, despised in Jerusalem, He stands of all men the Man of Sorrows. He had friends and followers, it is true, who had left all to be His disciples. Yet even here He knew the sorrow of contact with egotism, self-interest, perversity of understanding, unbelief, even treachery. How many of those who thronged Him sought Him not for His own sake, not for love of Him, but for the loaves and the fishes! And He knew it. His closest companions were occupied with hopes and ambitions which centred in an earthly and visible kingdom. Yet these were the men to whom His soul turned at a time when many forsook Him, yearning for the solace of human sympathy, with the pathetic appeal: "Will ye also go away?" At last, the time came when all forsook Him and fled. Alone, hated of men, forsaken and betrayed, He went to His bitter passion and death, the death of the cross. Over much of His life that cross had cast its dark shadow. He knew that the path He was treading led to Calvary, and "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." Even in the hour of that mystic glorifying, when He talked on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, what He spoke of was "his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." That certainty was all along present to His mind. And then the anticipated hour came at last, the hour of darkness and of the transient triumph of the powers of evil, the hour of betrayal, of mocking, of torture, of bodily exhaustion, of spiritual depression, when God Himself seemed to have forsaken Him, the hour of supreme anguish and of death.

¶ The severest of all the limitations of Jesus lay in the isolation of His life, both actual and spiritual. It is recorded that He was homeless, but the absence of a dwelling-place—sufficient privation in itself—was a symbol of an intellectual, moral, and spiritual homelessness such as, in its last rigours, passes our comprehension. No man has ever been so lonely as was Jesus. None has ever experienced so entire a disappointment of the social instinct. It is true that He had the attachment of His disciples, but these men were inaccessible to the ideas and motives which formed His constant theme. With infinite patience He strove to make them partakers of what was the inspiration of His own life, but to the close they misunderstood Him.

However deeply personal misunderstanding wounded Him, there is no trace of scar in the Man as we behold Him; it was when "the kingdom" was misunderstood, when the spiritual was exploited in interests political or legal, when human life was cheapened, when the Magdalen's gift or the publican's hospitality was misconstrued, it was then that the wound was inflicted, that the isolation became anguish. This is something so altogether beyond the experience of ordinary life that many men and women must live and die without so much as a glimpse of the lonely regions Jesus trod.[1]

3. But the real sorrow of Christ was "the travail of his soul" in bearing the burden of our sin. In some mysterious manner He became identified with the guiltiness and sinfulness of our poor human nature. He was "made to be sin for us, who knew no sin." The sting of death is sin; and it was necessary that He should receive that sting into His own bosom. In Gethsemane He trembled under the fearful oppression of the touch of sin; but the trembling at length passed away, and He braced Himself to endure the cross, and be "made a curse for us." He reached the climax of His unspeakable anguish—the darkness, blacker than midnight, which for a space rested on His soul—when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" To be forsaken of God is the last consequence of sin—the very hell of hell. The Redeemer had to endure for a season the awful sense of Divine rejection and desertion, in order that we sinful men might be readily reconciled to God, and become partakers of eternal life.

The Son of God could not identify Himself absolutely with the human race without mysteriously realizing the last consequence of sin. From that even He shrank: but it was inevitable. He drank the bitter cup to the dregs, and it killed Him. As a distinguished physician has pointed out, all the physical symptoms indicated that Christ died literally of a broken heart. He did not die of crucifixion. In the ordinary course of nature He would have lingered for many hours. But when God mysteriously forsook Him, it was more than He could endure and live. It broke His heart literally and metaphorically. Body and soul alike were crushed by the awful experience, and, with a loud

[1] T. J. Hardy, *The Gospel of Pain.*

ry, He yielded up His spirit to God. He was a willing victim. No man took His life from Him. He laid it down of His own ccord; and by so doing He paid such unparalleled homage to His own justice and His own righteousness that henceforward He ould consistently be both "just and the justifier" of sinful man.

¶ St. John's record of the Passion is from the beginning to the nd a revelation of majesty. No voice of suffering, no horror of hick darkness, find a place in it. Every indignity is so accepted y the Lord as to become part of a gracious and willing sacrifice. he words with which He goes forth to die are a declaration of a ictory which has been already achieved: "I have overcome the vorld." The words which precede His voluntary death are the atification of a work perfectly accomplished: "It is finished." he betrayal is fruitless till He places Himself in the hands of His enemies. He is Himself the Judge of His judges. Hanging pon the cross the Lord discharged with calm and tender uthority the last offices of personal affection, the last require- ients of the Scripture which He came to fulfil. He gave up His pirit; and still He lived through death.[1]

4. Christ's sorrow was wholly vicarious,—that is, it was pure ympathy, as pure as the rain which drops from the clouds, before t has become defiled by contact with the earth. It was the aithful reflection of the Divine sorrow. It was the sorrow of one vho Himself knew no sin, but who sorrowed for those who did. All the weight of sorrow which He bore was, strictly speaking, urs and not His. He had not known sorrow if He had not nown us. It is a very common mistake to regard vicarious uffering as being an institution of religion and as such needing pology; whereas, so far from being in conflict with our highest leas of justice and morality, it is an inevitable part of all deep oral experience, and has operated throughout the history of the ace as a powerful redemptive force. No one has ever tried to erve others without having had to face the necessity of suffering n their behalf. Suffering is the experience in which men feel heir oneness with their kind. Christ, too, by suffering felt His neness with men; but largely in order to assert a singularity eyond. Through suffering He became like unto men, but only hat He might effect through suffering a lonely and a singular ervice for them. We know from common human experience that

[1] B. F. Westcott, *The Victory of the Cross*, 95.

there is no real sympathy with suffering save in the breasts of those who have themselves suffered. In the school of pain men learn lessons that can be taught them nowhere else. And we can hardly conceive a Saviour who could be equal to our deepest need unless He were also one who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And when we take sin into account the same thing appears more clearly. We may dupe and deceive ourselves for a time, but it thrusts itself upon our attention, and the consciousness of it cannot be gainsaid. Because it is the burden of our life, therefore it was the burden of Christ's. He had to face it if ever He was to become the Redeemer of the world; and it was no light and easy task. He can speak to the soul in the anguish of penitence as no other can, because He has Himself done battle with the enemy, has faced the worst that evil can do and come out in the end victorious. The cross of Jesus confronts us with the perfection of sorrow, which is the perfection of sympathy, and out of this assured sympathy spring redemption and reconciliation and pardon and peace and everlasting life.

¶ John Richard Green, before he began to write his history of England, was a curate in the East End of London, and he bore the burden of the East End upon his heart. He tells in one of his letters how he tried to reclaim some of the fallen, and he says that the appalling thing to him was this—to find that they were where they were simply because of their indifferent attitude. He said to them it was such a little thing to step down there, and now he could not get them to realize that it was a big thing to step from down there up here into the life of purity. It was all indifference that was responsible for that. The sorrows of humanity and its sins broke the heart of One whose cry is to the end of time, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" If I could, I would take every one of you where you could see it, the Face that was marred more than any man's and the form more than the sons of men. If you asked me why, I should say, "The consequences of your guilt, the curse of your sin, rested upon Him, the innocent for the guilty, that He might wake your soul and bring you to God, and help you to save the world." Is it nothing to you, nothing? Is that your final answer? Have you nothing more to say than that Jesus Christ and His Passion are nothing to you? "Oh, no," you say; "No, we do not say that; we do feel something, and think something." What is your practical answer? That is the only thing that matters. What is your practical

answer to Jesus Christ and Him crucified? Is it nothing, or rather does it pledge you once again to give your youth, your powers, and all you have, in glorious self-abandonment for the service of God, and for the good of humanity?[1]

III.

1. To Jesus the suffering He was called on to endure was not aimless, and gave Him no reason to doubt the goodness and mercy of His Father. He saw, as we often do not and cannot, behind the veil. He realized that there was a purpose in it all, and the joy that was set before Him became as a blessed anodyne that helped Him to endure the shame. His lowly service and suffering were such integral parts of the work He had come into the world to do that He took them quietly and almost as a matter of course. And His example teaches us at least this, that we may look for the silver lining to the clouds above our heads. In much of what we are called to endure there is a gracious and fruitful discipline, and happy are they who can see it and whose faith can help them to be still and open not their mouths. There is not one who sorrows now, no matter what his grief and gloom, who cannot find his pain met, and overwhelmed, and swallowed up in the sea of eternal suffering love that presents itself in Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus Christ take the problem of sorrow for granted. It is there before them. But in Christ they find its practical solution. Behold the Man of Sorrows, the One who is acquainted with grief. His experience gives us the power by which we accept sorrow. If in an evil world He knew sorrow as He did, by the same token He says to us, "Ye now therefore have sorrow." And we are bidden accordingly to look "unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Through His sorrow we may surely see something of the purpose of sorrow, as a privilege peculiar to man. It lifts him forward and upward to a destiny not vouchsafed to

[1] C. Silvester Horne.

nature below him. If man is to rise in the struggle which must be and is against sin in an imperfect world, sorrow is a necessary condition and a purifying element.

¶ One of the characteristic paradoxes of Christianity is that its sorrow and happiness co-exist. Christ is the Man of Sorrows, yet we cannot think of Him for a moment as an unhappy man. He rather gives us the picture of serene and unclouded happiness. Beneath not merely the outward suffering, but the profound sorrow of heart, there is deeper still a continual joy, derived from the realized presence of His Father and the consciousness that He is doing His work. Unless this is remembered, the idea of the Man of Sorrows is sentimentalized and exaggerated.[1]

2. The sorrow of Christ has been a blessedly fruitful sorrow. All sorrow yields fruit according to its kind; but it is not possible to measure the fruitfulness of the atoning death of the Redeemer. His sorrow on earth was the path to His eternal reward in heaven; and the depth of His sufferings is the measure of the height of His mediatorial exaltation. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Because He was the Man of Sorrows He is now the King of Glory. And who can tell how fruitful of blessing the Redeemer's sorrow has been to His people? Jesus wept that He might one day wipe away all tears from the eyes of millions. He sorrowed that multitudes might rejoice. He shed His blood that many a bleeding heart might be healed. He tasted death that a new life might be breathed into the souls of men. He was made "perfect through sufferings" that He might "bring many sons unto glory." Every believer can testify of the Redeemer, as Bunyan's pilgrim did: "He hath given me joy by His sorrow, and life by His death." Christ's cross is His throne, and it is by His death that He has ruled the ages. Yet we must not understand this as if His power was only or mostly shown in binding men, by gratitude for the salvation He won them, to own Him for their King. His power has been even more conspicuously proved in making His fashion of service the most fruitful and the most honoured among men. If men have ceased to turn from sickness with aversion or from weakness with contempt; if they have learned to see in all pain some law of God, and in vicarious

[1] C. W. Emmet.

suffering God's most holy service; if patience and self-sacrifice have come in any way to be a habit of human life,—the power in this change has been Christ. But because these two—to say, "Thy will be done," and to sacrifice self—are for us men the hardest and the most unnatural of things to do, Jesus Christ, in making these a conscience and a habit upon earth, has indeed performed the very highest service for man of which man can conceive.

¶ A little book, entitled *The Man of No Sorrows*," which presents a counterfeit Christ as the real friend of the modern advancing age, startles at first by its apparent audacious blasphemy; until we perceive how in the end the real Christ comes back, at the call of the agony of the world which banished Him—the world which has fallen from the pinnacle of selfish luxury and callous enjoyment to the very depths of hideous anarchy and despair. In repentance and horror the false Messiah cries aloud in agony to the Man of Sorrows, who returns in tender mercy to a world in the very throes of death, and casts across it the colossal shadow of His rejected cross, which shall heal its sin, and its violence and its woes.[1]

¶ One Sunday evening in December, Thackeray was walking with two friends along the Dean Road, to the west of Edinburgh—one of the noblest outlets to any city. It was a lovely evening—such a sunset as one never forgets; a rich dark bar of cloud hovered over the sun, going down behind the Highland hills, lying bathed in amethystine bloom; between this cloud and the hills there was a narrow slip of the pure ether, of a tender cowslip colour, lucid, and as if it were the very body of heaven in its clearness; every object standing out as if etched upon the sky. The north-west end of Corstorphine Hill, with its trees and rocks, lay in the heart of this pure radiance, and there a wooden crane, used in the quarry below, was so placed as to assume the figure of a cross; there it was, unmistakable, lifted up against the crystalline sky. All three gazed at it silently. As they gazed, he gave utterance in a tremulous, gentle, and rapid voice, to what all were feeling, in the word "Calvary!" The friends walked on in silence, and then turned to other things. All that evening he was very gentle and serious, speaking, as he seldom did, of divine things,—of death, of sin, of eternity, of salvation; expressing his simple faith in God and in his Saviour.[2]

[1] E. Hicks, *Our Life Here*, 42.

[2] Dr. John Brown, *Horæ Subsecivæ*, iii. 189.

The Death of the Soul.

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The Death of the Soul.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.—Ezek. xviii. 4, 27.

1. In these simple words the Prophet was directed to answer the sad proverb in which the popular voice had summed up the teachings of Hebrew history. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," it was said. Here was a sufficient account of their national ruin; here was the secret of their anguish as they lay in captivity. As men will, the Jews eagerly caught at any theory of life which would divert responsibility from themselves. The Babylonian exile was their misfortune, not their fault. It was the fault of their fathers, for whose sins it was that things had come to such a pass. So they said to Ezekiel, as they had said to Jeremiah, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." That the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children was a familiar thought to them. They had been taught from the earliest days of the nation that idolatry—the worship of strange gods—would entail an inheritance of evil upon posterity, and the truth of the lesson had been learnt by a bitter experience. But self-excuse is self-accusation; and when the Hebrews began to appeal to that national heritage which should have been a source of strength as a cause of weakness, it was plain that the conscience of the nation was at fault.

2. Ezekiel met the fixed iron fatalism of the people—the plea, "It is all a matter of heredity"—with the all-encompassing and indefeasible doctrine of the personal responsibility of each man for his own sin, as distinct from the distorted notion of inherited and transmitted guilt and suffering they were proclaiming. God says, he told them, Behold, all souls are Mine; each is of equal

and independent value; as the soul of the father, so is the soul of the son; the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die—*it*, and not another for it; *it* alone, and only for its own conscious and inward wrong. Every man is a unit, an integer needing no fraction from the present, or past, or future, to complete his being. His responsibility is personal, exclusive, individual, and entire. Each soul of man dwells in the awful solitude of its individual obligation to God. "Teeth set on edge" are not signs of personal sin; suffering is no proof of personal wrong, and is not "death." It is sin that kills, and sin is and must be of personal will and individual intelligence. No man sins for another; no man dies for another. God's ways are all equal, and righteousness is the glory of His administration. Heredity is a fact; but it accounts neither for the sum of human suffering nor for the presence of individual sin. The Jews thought that present suffering was to be explained *en bloc* by past sin. The fact of a man being born blind was to be accounted for by his parents having sinned. The law of heredity was recognized by the prophet as largely explaining the fact of moral degeneration, but he shows that it does not fully explain it. There are limitations to the law of heredity. Each individual soul stands in a direct and personal relationship to God; each person alone, and from this point of view unaffected by the position of his father, has an individuality—has character, and moral worth. Hence the individual that sins shall die—not for the sin he may have inherited, not because of any relationship to a father, but for the sin he himself has done.

And as sin is individual, so the call to repentance, which is the keynote of the prophet's ministry, is addressed to individual men, and, in order that it may take effect, their minds must be disabused of all fatalistic preconceptions which would induce paralysis of the moral faculties. It was necessary to affirm in all their breadth and fulness the two fundamental truths of personal religion—the absolute righteousness of God's dealings with individual men, and His readiness to welcome and pardon the penitent.

3. So the prophet's teaching is that in human history and human life there is something higher than the law of heredity, as we now call it. There is a spirit, a soul in man, and the Almighty

has given him understanding. The spirit of man is akin to the Divine Spirit, and in this kinship it has a spring of higher life. It has an impulse of its own, which no circumstances can overbear, which connects it at once with the consciousness and the power of self action, of doing that which is lawful and right, and so, under whatever disadvantages, of saving the soul alive; or again, of doing that which is evil, and so bringing death to itself. Ezekiel, in the Old Testament, is the great teacher of this deepest of spiritual truths. "Other prophets," it has been said, "have more of poetical beauty, a deeper sense of Divine things, a tenderer feeling of the mercies of God for His people; none teach so simply—and with a simplicity the more remarkable from the elaborate imagery out of which it emerges—the great lesson that the individual soul is free before God, that it has within it the power of good and evil, and that God will judge it, not for anything done by others, but by its own doings." Every man is responsible for his own life and conduct, and must be held directly accountable to God. Collectivism received its death-blow before such teaching as this, and men were seen to stand or fall according to their lives, which were regarded as the index to the state of the individual heart; God refused to deal with men solely upon principles of moral heredity.

¶ One day, as Ezekiel strayed by the river-side, he had what he calls a vision—what would now be called a spiritual experience. Doubtless there were men besides Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar that day; but these saw only a sheet of water and heard only a murmuring sound. To Ezekiel the sheet of water was a crystal mirror revealing the Kingdom of God, and the murmuring sound was the voice of the Divine Spirit.

And what did that voice say? What was the message which greeted him by the river-side? Let me try to paraphrase it. It said: Ezekiel, your people have an exaggerated sense of the power of heredity. They are making the sins of their fathers an excuse for their own. They are claiming their iniquities as an inevitable inheritance; they are trying to throw their responsibility upon the long line of their ancestors. Go and tell them they are mistaken! Tell them there is a force in this world *besides* hereditary force—the force of the individual soul! Tell them there is a power in the personal will which can modify the will of the ages! Proclaim to each man that he is *not* bound to yield to the current of the stream! Bid him remember that he

can resist the current! Reveal to him the secret of his own personality—its secret and its awfulness! Tell him to practise inflexibility, to practise resistance to the waters! Bid him cultivate determination, resolution, unwaveringness of purpose! Teach him to train his will as he would train his eye! Exhort him to withstand by daily exercise the pressure of that ancestral stream of passion which has widened into a river and is deepening into a sea!

That is the message to Ezekiel. I could imagine no more trenchant message for our own day. We are very much in the position of Ezekiel's countrymen. We have invested heredity with an absolute power. We are in danger of forgetting our responsibility. We want an Ezekiel—some preacher to tell us, not of the race, but of the individual. We want something to strengthen, not the nation, but the unit. Anything that gives force to the individual man will be our Ezekiel, and ought to be welcomed as such.[1]

I.

The Responsibility of the Individual.

"The soul that sinneth."

1. The feeling is deep-seated in our nature that sin is excusable; that it comes from causes which we cannot help; that it has borne us down and carried us away, rather than been of our own seeking. Our circumstances are made to excuse it. The strength of temptation, the weakness of will, our surroundings, the events of our time, the inevitable sequence of our life. There may be much in such facts, and Scripture does not ignore their influence on the side of truth in the necessarian view of life. Scripture not only does not say there is no truth in it; it often emphasizes it. Yet it never forgets the deeper truth, and so never lowers it. It never allows any pressure of circumstances really to excuse us. It appeals from all external conditions to the inner sanctuary of the self, and says to the sinner in the very pride of his sin, when perhaps he has put conscience to sleep, and enthroned sensual appetite above Divine desire, You are the man. You have sinned, and you know it. You have preferred the evil to the good. You have chosen darkness rather than light, your deeds being evil. Do not try to excuse yourself by circumstances; you know that your

[1] G. Matheson, *The Representative Men of the Bible*, ii. 321.

sins lay deeper than any circumstances—in your own will, your own choice of the evil when you had power to choose otherwise. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." Your own higher nature is not befooled. "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

¶ The Bible is full of the doctrine of heredity. Whatever view we may take of the Fall, it holds as a declaration of the unbroken sequence in cause and effect between the latest generations and the earliest. The Old Testament doctrine, that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation, is to the same effect. But the Bible, while admitting and affirming the solidarity of the race and the large extent to which man's destiny is shaped for him before his birth, is at direct issue with the materialistic fatalism which would rid the individual of moral responsibility.

What religion, in fact, contends for is that the human ego within a certain limited area—an area conditioned by the facts of heredity and the existing environment—is a fount of creative power. Surrounded by competing and often opposing currents of influence, which beat upon it from both the material and the spiritual world, it has the faculty of choosing which of these it shall yield itself to. The immense changes that come over men as the result of the differing influences under which from time to time they place themselves, show that our characters are not ready-made and irreversible, but are every day in the making. The view of life, in fact, which accords most closely with Scripture, with the facts of experience, and with our deepest moral intuitions, is that which regards it as an inheritance which we are to deal with as we will. We have not made the inheritance. It comes down to us from the far past, carrying with it all manner of burdens, limitations, mortgages and what not, the result of the good or bad stewardship of those who held it before us. For these limitations we are not answerable. What we are responsible for is, when once in possession, to do the best with what there is. That the estate may have been impoverished by a spendthrift ancestor does not absolve us from the obligation of personal thrift. The more does that lie upon us, in order to improve what is left and hand it on in improved conditions to the next heir. And the man who seeks to do this will find in Christ's Gospel a store of vital energy which will make him master of his fate.[1]

[1] J. Brierley.

2. Theories of circumstance are ready to affirm that we are what we are by evolution, and cannot help ourselves any more than we can help the shape of our limbs or the strength of our arms. But what human creature—in whom there is any higher life at all—does not know that the soul is mightier than circumstance, and that there is a fear of judgment which penetrates all excuses we can ever make for ourselves? There is in all of us an imperishable sense of individuality which is capable of stemming any stream of influence, and which asserts itself against our lower selves, and makes us responsible for all we say and think and do. And it is out of this that all true sense of religion springs. Because we are souls, and because our souls are God's, this feeling of responsibility lives; it springs conscious within us, even when we try to kill it. The greatest evil-doer pales at times before the spectre of his own evil-doing, and the most ingenious sophist who tries to call darkness light and evil good knows in his inmost heart that he is deceiving himself. As surely as the soul sinneth it shall die. No excuse will avail. In our hearts we know that no circumstances compelled us to sin. It is no mere denunciation of Scripture. It is the voice of our own hearts. It is the utterance of our own living consciousness. It is a true psychology, the voice of philosophy as well as of Scripture, which tells us we are without excuse. Even when we try to excuse ourselves we are ashamed. We have lost our excuse; our plea of circumstances cannot stand examination. The more our heart is true, the more our spiritual sight is clear, the more does our sin make itself our own, and accuse and condemn us. And if this is not to verify the fact of responsibility, one knows not what verification means.

¶ We are beginning to interpret the world in which man as an individual and apparently separate personality maintains his life, not as a hindrance to his freedom or as the enemy of his private good, but as the means whereby these may be attained. The world is an enemy only when it is misunderstood and misused. It obstructs the ignorant mind and frustrates and reproves the perverse will; but for the mind that is awake and alive, and the heart that is made wise unto goodness, it is a vast, rich inheritance waiting to be entered upon and possessed. Man has but to learn the true proportion of things, distinguishing great things and lasting things from the small, and he will find the truth declared by the Man of Sorrows, who was the greatest optimist the world

ever knew, to be valid for all thought and all practice—"Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you." The natural world is the instrument of moral issues, and the universe a place for the making of souls. If man's environment baffles, hinders, frustrates and ultimately defeats him, so that his whole career looks an empty thing of less than no account and ends in darkness, it is because that environment has been misinterpreted and misemployed by him and his fellows.[1]

3. There is a strict balance of justice in all God's ways. He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear; but He will require of us that which He has committed to us. Let us stand in awe and sin not, and let us take heed that the gift of eternal life, of life in Himself, which He has given in the Son, be not lost through unbelief. If we were merely the creatures of circumstance, did the law of heredity bind us in an iron embrace, it would be hard indeed that we should suffer, not from anything in ourselves, but from the inevitable consequences of others' sins. The doctrine of the Fall has sometimes been preached as if this were its meaning. We may be sure, whatever its meaning may be, that this is not its meaning. The reach of retribution is proportioned to the egoism of sin, as even the story of the Fall might have told any intelligent reader. As the soul of the father, so the soul of the son is Mine. It has its own individual relation to Me, its own powers and responsibilities; and only when it violates this of its own free act shall it incur the penalty of violation. Only the soul that sinneth shall die, shall receive the heart of death into itself. The principle which the prophet insists upon is not the strict retributive righteousness of God, but the moral freedom and independence of the individual person. The individual is not involved in the destiny of his fathers or of his people; neither does he lie under an irrevocable doom pronounced over him by his past life. The immediate relation of every spirit to God and its moral freedom to break with its own past raises it above both these dooms. What Ezekiel says of man is that each stands in immediate relation to God and shall live or die according as he repents or continues in his sin. Let us never forget that all well-being depends upon well-doing, and that well-doing

[1] Sir Henry Jones, *Social Powers*, 20.

and ill-doing are essentially individual. We cannot any of us live vicariously in the mass around us. We cannot do our duty by substitute. Even so let us remember that if we do ill we commit sin. Let no one think he can escape in the mass. For though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. Of all things sure in life—in the end if not in the beginning, at the last if not at the first—is the course of Divine retribution. It may be delayed, but it will come. It will fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

¶ "The soul that sinneth, it shall die,"—is that a threat? Is it not the deep utterance of a truth? Indeed, there cannot be a threat that is not the deep utterance of a truth, for no man can permanently suffer except by the eternal necessities of things,—not by whim, but by law. Is it not, then, as if it said, "The soul that sinneth *dies*, dies *in* its sinning, dies because for a soul there is no life but holiness"? "To sin is just so far to cease to live," we said. May we not also say, "To cease to live is just so far to sin"? The man who does no duty because he has taught other men and himself to look upon him as an unenterprising, good-natured mortal to whom they are to bring no duties,—the creature who sometimes ventures to demand our respect for the very qualities which make him contemptible, who is conservative because radicalism is troublesome and calm because enthusiasm is a bore;—all these, when we see them as Christ sees them, we shall know are wicked men. The lazy and labour-saving saint is a sinner. The man who is not vitally good, is bad, for he is shutting his heart against the work of Him who came that men might have *life*. God teach us all that to be alive is the first condition of being good![1]

II.

The Retribution of the Individual.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

1. All through Scripture, "spirit" denotes life as coming from God, "soul" denotes life as constituted in the man. Consequently, when the individual life is to be made emphatic "soul" is used. "Soul," in Scripture, freely denotes persons. "My soul" is the

[1] Phillips Brooks, *The More Abundant Life*, 128.

Ego, the self, and when used, like "heart," for the inner man, and even for the feelings, has reference always to the special individuality. "Spirit," on the other hand, seldom or never used to denote the individual human being in this life, is primarily that imparted power by which the individual lives, the innermost of the inner life, the higher aspect of the self or personality. The inner nature is named "soul," "after its special, individual life," and "spirit" "after the living power which forms the condition of its special character."

2. Here then it is the "soul" that is spoken of—"the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The language is metaphorical. Sin is a disease; the end of the disease of sin is death. All through the earlier history of the Jews, sickness and sin had been associated as effect and cause; God had taught them by that association the real kinship which we know exists between the two. And disease had come to be the natural analogue of sin, the visible symbol of the invisible, till they came to look forward to their Messiah as a Great Physician of souls. And when the Christ came, He gave His *imprimatur* to that association of ideas. He healed every sickness and every disease among the people; but His mission was to heal the broken-hearted, to seek and to save the lost.

The thought of sin as a deadly sickness is perhaps more than a metaphor. For what is disease in the body but the failure of the organism to perform its functions aright? Life, in the language of biologists, is perfect correspondence to environment; and disease, which is imperfect correspondence, is incipient death. And if, as our heart tells us, God has made us for Himself—made us to find our own true life in Him—then sin is, in a very real sense, like a disease, and leads on to dissolution.

3. If physical life may be defined as "the sum total of the functions which resist death," then spiritual life, in like manner, is the sum total of the functions which resist sin. As it is life alone that gives the plant power to utilize the elements, and as, without it, they utilize it, so it is the spiritual life alone that gives the soul power to utilize temptation and trial; and without it they destroy the soul. This destroying process goes on quite

independently of God's judgment on sin. God's judgment on sin is another and a more awful fact of which this may be a part. But it is a distinct fact by itself, which we can hold and examine separately, that on purely natural principles the soul that is left to itself unwatched, uncultivated, unredeemed, must fall away into death by its own nature. "The soul that sinneth, *it shall die.*" It has neglected "the functions which resist death," and has always been dying. The punishment is in its very nature, and the sentence is being gradually carried out all along the path of life by ordinary processes which enforce the verdict with the appalling faithfulness of law.

¶ What is meant by the death of the soul, human thought can not understand; because we know not what man loses when he loses heaven. The two great elements of the death of the soul are the absence of all that constitutes life and the presence of everything that constitutes despair. There is for ever present to the soul the consciousness of this its twofold misery. The death of the soul does not deprive it of its consciousness—it is ever conscious, ever sensitive, ever active. It is "dead," indeed, as the Apostle states, "in trespasses and sin"—dead to all influences of spiritual joy and peace, dead to all enjoyments of eternal bliss in heaven, dead to all love to God and things holy and Divine. There is no living joy in such a soul, no active love, no calming peace, no animating hope. Like the Dead Sea, nothing pure, good, lovely, healthful, lives in it, moves over it, grows around it; it is a bleak, bare, stagnant, desolate pool of bitter sorrow, barren of every delight, and breeding only the noxious exhalations of a miasma, which ever wraps the soul as in the winding sheet of eternal death.[1]

¶ The soul that sins dies, not because God utters a sentence of death and inflicts a positive punishment, but by and from the very nature of sin, and in consequence of the ordinary and necessary processes of a well and wisely-ordered world. The "death" of a man or a nation is not from a Divine fiat, and due to the issue of an irresistible edict; it is the inevitable outcome of conscious and intelligent acts on the part of men and nations, and is directly and immediately due to their choice of deeds in a world formed for the perpetuity and eternal reproductiveness of goodness and the sure, if slow, decay and disappearance of wrong. God is love, love of righteousness which is man's highest and most enduring welfare, and therefore

[1] W. B. Stevens, *Sermons*, 25.

No action whether foul or fair,
Is ever done, but it leaves somewhere
A record, written by fingers ghostly,
As a blessing or a curse, and mostly
In the greater weakness or greater strength
Of the acts which follow it, till at length
The wrongs of ages are redressed,
And the justice of God made manifest![1]

4. There is a yet deeper thought about sin. It is not only a disease of human nature; it is also a transgression of God's eternal law of right. While the conception of a creditor who will have payment to the last farthing is utterly alien from the belief in a God of love, the very idea of God requires a vindication of the law of right. It is this that makes men feel that mere forgiveness of sins, the mere treating sin as if it were not, is an impossible thing. God cannot relax the moral law. He did not create it; it is eternal as Himself. Right is right not because God makes it so, but because the moral law is the revelation of God's eternal nature. Every sin, in its degree, separates from God. This is the unvarying note of sin. But separation from God, even a partial separation, or estrangement, has an immediate reflex action upon man. To turn from God is not only to reject His love, it is by that very rejection to degrade human nature. Hence the first act of sin is rightly called a *fall*, and the expulsion from Eden was the symbol of that change which sin had wrought in man.

¶ A first point in the Christian doctrine of sin is that sin does not arise as part of the necessary order of the universe, but has its origin or spring in *personal will*, revolting against God and goodness. Apart from special texts, sin is everywhere represented in Scripture as originating in voluntary disobedience on the part of man, as unfaithfulness to better knowledge, as wilful choosing of evil rather than of good—all flesh "corrupting" its way upon the earth. Only on this ground is sin something that God can judge and punish. Sin, as originating in a law-defying *egoism*, is a principle of *God-negation*. It cannot cohere with love to God, trust in Him, or enjoyment in His presence. The possibility of a spiritual communion is dissolved. The "love of the world," with its new ruling principles, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life," excludes the "love of the Father." It is easy to see the stamp of egoism which rests on all life in

[1] John Clifford, *Daily Strength for Daily Living*, 277.

separation from God. Self-centred enjoyment, self-centred culture, self-centred morality, self-centred science, self-centred religion even (Worship of Humanity)—such are among the world's ideals. John Foster remarks somewhere that men are as afraid to let God touch any of their schemes as they are of the touch of fire. It is the old Stoic *αὐτάρκεια*, self-sufficiency, not without a certain nobleness where men had nothing else, but sin in its renunciation of dependence on God. Existence on such a basis is doomed to futility.[1]

5. This leads us to the thought that retribution for sin does not always end with the sinner. The hereditary taint is not to be denied because it is often abused. Conscious disobedience to a moral law whose authority we recognize as binding us weakens not only the will of the sinner himself, but the will of his descendants when their turn comes to combat the forces of evil. This weakness and waywardness of the will in its warfare with the passions is what has been called by theologians, though the phrase has no Scriptural authority, "original sin." It may perhaps be said that the phrase is not a very happy one; it is likely to mislead the unwary. For sin is essentially a personal, conscious act. But it is the expression of a truth which is as surely revealed in Scripture, and as firmly established by experience, as that of individual responsibility.

¶ Disease, accidents, pain, and death, reign everywhere, and we call one another *mortals*, as if our chief peculiarity was that we must die, and you all know how death came into this world. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;" and disease, disorder, and distress are the fruits of sin, as truly as that apple grew on that forbidden tree. You have nowadays all sorts of schemes for making bad men good, and good men better. The world is full of such schemes, some of them wise and some foolish; but to be wise they must all go on the principle of lessening misery by lessening *sin*; so that the old weaver at Kilmarnock who, at a meeting for abolishing slavery, the corn laws, and a few more things, said, "Mr. Chairman, I move that we abolish Original Sin," was at least beginning at the right end.[2]

¶ The most common cause of blindness is ophthalmia of the new-born. One pupil in every three at the institution for the blind in New York City was blinded in infancy by this disease.

[1] J. Orr, *Sin as a Problem of To-day*, 100.

[2] Dr. John Brown, *Plain Words on Health*, 28.

One-fourth of the inmates of the New York State Home for the Blind, six hundred sightless persons in the State of New York, between six thousand and seven thousand persons in the United States were plunged into darkness by ophthalmia neonatorum.

What is the cause of this disease? It is a specific germ communicated by the mother to the child at birth. Previous to the child's birth she has unconsciously received it through infection from her husband. He has contracted the infection in licentious relations before or since marriage. "The cruellest link in the chain of consequences," says Dr. Prince Marrow, "is the mother's innocent agency. She is made a passive, unconscious medium of instilling into the eyes of her new-born babe a virulent poison which extinguishes its sight." In mercy, let it be remembered the father does not know that he has so foully destroyed the eyes of his child and handicapped him for life. It is part of the bitter harvest of the wild oats he has sown. Society has smiled upon his "youthful recklessness" because society does not know that

> They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin.[1]

¶ Heredity may modify and condition responsibility: it cannot destroy or disannul it in the normal individual. A man is not necessarily responsible for the circumstance that certain possessions were bequeathed to him; but in so far as they are his possessions he is responsible for the use he makes of them. Where inheritance and heir are one the conditions are not otherwise. "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." At the same time, heredity introduces shades of responsibility so subtle and delicate that the more we study men as we see them around us, the more impossible it appears for us to be able to judge any man, the more we feel that God alone can judge righteously.[2]

III.

God's Offer of Life.

"He shall save his life."

1. Ezekiel urges upon the Hebrews that the pollution of sin is not hopeless. The burden of his exhortation is that the wicked

[1] Helen Keller, *Out of the Dark*, 176.
[2] J. Y. Simpson, *The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature*, 237.

man may turn away from his wickedness and live, that repentance and recovery are within man's power. Here is man; what is his inheritance? The nature of Adam? True; but behind and beyond that he has inherited the image of God. The one inheritance is as surely his as the other. For with the tendency to do wrong, man has also received the power to do right. And thus, although it be true that if he yields to temptation he is yielding to that to which his nature is inclined, for he has inherited the weakness of his forefathers, it is also true that such yielding is sin, for he had the strength to resist had it been his choice. He is not the son of Adam only, but the son of God; and in the power of that Divine inheritance he may overcome. We have inherited the consequences of Adam's sin; but it is only in so far as we embrace and accept them, only in so far as we make his sin our sin, by transgressing under temptation some known and recognized law of God, that we are responsible, that we are guilty. Each soul bears its own sin; "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." But if "the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, he shall save his soul alive." How much farther than even this splendid outburst of hope does the teaching of St. Paul reach. What does he say? "As through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous." In Adam the taint, in Christ the remedy; in Adam the inherited slavery of the will, in Christ the grace which frees us from these bonds.

2. The death of Christ, "the Eternal Son of God," teaches us, as nothing else can, what sin is, and how awful is the purity and holiness of God. We begin to see why "remission of sins" belongs so especially to the death of Christ rather than to His Incarnation. We begin to see why the cross is so dear to the pardoned sinner. In the cross of Calvary we see that finished work whereby the sins of the past are done away, the wound of nature is healed, freedom from bondage is won, since man is once more reconciled, made just in the sight of God, "accepted in the beloved." By the sacrifice of the cross is revealed the infinite love of God, in vindicating the eternal law, and yet saving man from death. No legal fiction, no mere vicarious sacrifice, can

satisfy our conscience, and make us just before God. It was man that sinned; it is man that must suffer.

O generous love! that He who smote
In Man for man the foe,
The double agony in Man
For man should undergo.

It is a beautiful suggestion of the greatest of the Schoolmen, that the perfect love and obedience of the perfect manhood, taken into God, was to the Father something He loved more than He hated sin. But, in our day, we love rather to think of the summing up of humanity in Christ, the offering up of all the members in Him who is the Head. So viewed, Christ's death becomes what it has been finely called, "the Amen of humanity" to the righteous law which sin transgressed. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; and Christ, the perfect Man, and man in Him, admits the justice of that law. So is the eternal law vindicated; so is the Father once more well pleased as He looks on man in His well-beloved Son; so to men and angels God shows Himself "just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

3. In Christ there dwells the eternal life of God, and the eternal life of God through Him is made the inheritance of those who gratefully receive His pardon for sin and the gift of the power that renders righteousness possible. And therefore when we read the story of His uprightness, of His patience, of His goodness, of His gentleness, of His self-sacrifice, we have courage to attempt to imitate Him, or we can live the life that He lived in the power of the life that dwells in Him. He is not remote from us, commanding the reverence of succeeding centuries but altogether beyond our reach. We have discovered that the roots of our life are in Him; and all Christian men know that whenever they attempt the higher forms of goodness, in the strength that comes to them from Christ, those forms become possible to them because they are natural to Him. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"—that is the imperfect order. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"—that, too, is not the final order. In the power of another life than ours we, too, live a life transcending our own strength, as through the

death of the Son we receive the forgiveness of all our sin. The solidarity of the race, imperfectly revealed in the transient order, has its final interpretation in God's ultimate conception—the race was created in Christ, and in Christ it is to achieve its eternal perfection.

¶ There is a season in the lifetime of each of us when all that the word "life" expresses has a greater charm for us than any other good thing, though it is then that all good things are poured out before us in the richest abundance. Life seems to flow bounteously within us and around us, and we are slow to tolerate any restraints upon its exuberance. Many things which are then good in our eyes are permitted to draw us away from Him whom the Gospel calls our Life; and at best we find the stream of our inner self divided into many a mazy current. Yet if this inward distraction continues, the life which we prize is condemned to be fleeting in duration and fruitless in result. Now more than ever have we need of the one Master Life to take possession of us and of all His gifts to us. Now more than ever must we hold fast the faith, which experience will ratify in due time, that our own desires are less the ministers than the destroyers of life until they are subdued into glad obedience to His holy and hallowing Will, the Will of the Life that was crucified and rose again from the dead.[1]

[1] F. J. A. Hort, *The Way, the Truth, the Life*, 147.

God and the Sinner.

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God and the Sinner.

As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?—Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

1. Our text must be viewed in the light of the preceding fact that the prophet, by Divine commandment, had pronounced a judgment on Israel. That judgment had declared that their transgressions were on them, and that they would die in their sins. To this denunciation in the verse preceding the text they reply: "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" The answer of the people is an expression of despair and helplessness. But it is more. It charges God with the helplessness and despair of their situation, and seeks to justify themselves. It is as if they had said: "How can you blame us for not living? Who has resisted God's will? We are powerless to help ourselves! Our death is by God's imperious, irresistible decree. It is His pleasure that we should die, and we cannot help ourselves." To this charge, making God responsible for their death, the text replies: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

2. The people to whom Ezekiel's message was addressed were not familiar with the idea of the Divine righteousness, and they could not at once perceive that anger against sin was consistent in God with pity for the sinner and mercy towards the contrite. The task of the prophet was to transform their attitude of sullen impenitence into one of submission and hope, by teaching them the meaning of judgment, the efficacy of repentance, the possibility and the conditions of forgiveness. And this could be taught to

them only through a revelation of the free and infinite grace of God.

It is thus that God meets Israel's hard thoughts concerning Him. Instead of being provoked to anger by their rebelliousness He answers their suspicious unbelief by a reiteration of His words of grace. How patient, how long-suffering, how condescending! Instead of executing vengeance, He renews the assurances of His unfeigned, loving interest in their welfare. Unmoved by their taunts and charges of insincerity, He approaches them in the posture of a friend; He repeats the declaration of His gracious mind; He adds new, and larger, and fuller asseverations of His unwearied and inexhaustible compassion. God thus, in the most solemn way, declares to us His loving intentions. He has laid bare the inmost thoughts of His heart. He tells us that these thoughts are the very opposite of ours; that His desire is not to destroy, but to save.

I.

A Divine Declaration.

"As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

It would seem as if the despair of man won from God His profoundest secret, His most healing revelation. The solemn affirmation with which the text opens means that before we can disprove the benevolent attitude of the Divine mind toward the sinner we must disprove the being of God. "As I live, saith the Lord"; just as certain as I exist, just as certain as I have self-existence, just as certain as that existence is eternal, just as certain is it that God has no pleasure in men's everlasting death.

¶ Is it not wonderful that God should stoop so low as to confirm His promise by an oath? When men do this they always swear by one greater than themselves. God has none greater than Himself, so He swears by His own eternal being, saying, "As surely as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn unto me and live." I remember how astonished and touched I was when I first saw this truth. I wept with emotion at the thought of God's love and His eager desire that I should be saved; and I "fled for

refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me." I saw that His promise and His oath were quite sufficient for me to cling to, and that they could never, never fail.[1]

1. Among the most subtle devices of sin to keep the soul under its power, and prevent the man's turning to God, is the slandering of the Most High by misrepresenting His character. As dust blinds the eye, so does sin prevent the sinner from seeing God aright. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God"; but the wicked see only what they think to be God, and that, alas, is an image as unlike to God as possible! They say, for instance, that God is unmerciful, whereas He delighteth in mercy. The unfaithful servant in the parable was quite sure about it, and said most positively, "I knew that thou art an austere man"; whereas the nature of God is as opposite to overbearing and exaction as light is to darkness. When men once get this false idea of God into their minds they become hardened in heart; believing that it is useless to turn to God, they go on in their sins with greater determination. They conceive that God is either implacable, or that He is indifferent to human prayers, or that, if He should hear them, yet He is not in the least likely to grant a favourable answer.

¶ Mercy never bears so grand a look, or moves so majestically, as when she takes counsel of justice. No man is ever so magnificently just as he that can be even tenderly merciful, no man so truly merciful as one that can hold steadily exact the balance of truth and justice. Our highest impressions of God's justice are obtained when we conceive it as the partly discretionary dispensation of a mind in the tenderness and loving patience of the cross; our highest impressions of His mercy when we conceive it as the wonderful sacrifice to which even His justice allows Him to bend. Little honour then does any one pay to God's judicial majesty in a scheme of satisfaction that takes away His right of discretion and requires Him to stand for His exact equivalent of pain, according to the count of arithmetic.[2]

2. When we come to think of God, what is it we must find at the centre of His nature so far as we can conceive of Him in His greatness? Is it not His goodness—is it not that heart of

[1] J. Thain Davidson, *The City Youth*, 285.
[2] H. Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, 236.

benevolent intentions and desires that leads Him as the great centre to spread His mercies over all His works and to make manifest the loving-kindness of His heart whenever His ways are understood? Beyond all question, good is God, and God is good. God is love, and love properly understood is infinite goodness. In the deep nature where He feels more than all created goodness can feel, and the infinite intensity of that heart of love that constitutes Him God, is there not reason why He should say, and say with emphasis, and confirm it with this oath, as He has written it in the blood of His Son, that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is the attitude of God's mind towards sinners. Here is His yearning over them. Here is His boundless love. Here is the means devised for their redemption. Not even the devil can face that epitome of the gospel and affirm God's pleasure in the death of the wicked.

¶ Of the three great truths that God is Spirit, is Light, is Love, this last is the chief, for the other two ideas are incomplete without it. If, says Augustine, this one thing only were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, that God is *love*, nothing more ought we to require. All the Divine attributes are combined in love, as in their centre and vital principle. This unity of the Divine nature is more than a moral union, it is one of essence, it is one of holiness. In the words of Van Oosterzee, God is Holy Love. All His properties must be regarded as the attributes of love. God's power is thus the power of love; God's knowledge the intelligence of love; God's righteousness the righteousness of love.[1]

¶ The love of God is too great to understand and to grasp, for it is infinite. It would be too great to believe, only He who is the Truth has said it. Let us then wonder and be amazed at it, while we believe in it. This is the feeling God would work in you by it. "*Can* it be?" might be the question of wondering love at the infinite and unutterable love of God, or it might be doubt. When the question comes, let us thank God that it *is*, and then the feeling will be, not doubt but admiring love.[2]

3. The universality of the gospel invitations, their earnestness,

[1] R. F. Weidner, *Theologia, or the Doctrine of God*, 30.
[2] *The Story of Dr. Pusey's Life*, 361.

their broadness, is an evidence of the truth that a sinner's death can never be attributed to God's pleasure. God's pleasure runs in another direction. It is further evidenced by the welcome that is extended to the man who accepts the invitation and who returns to God. Read the fifteenth chapter of Luke, in that matchless parable of the prodigal son: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and . . . said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. . . . It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." In this beautiful image is expressed the attitude of God towards any sinner who turns and repents. The naturalness of it is the force of it. Its power is in the adaptation to our conception. We can understand when a wayward son has run away from home and wasted his substance in riotous living, and yet, when in want, seeks by repentance to return to the father's house—we can understand that the old man's heart would go out to his erring and wandering boy, and that he would not spurn him from his door; that he would keep the light shining in the windows that he might see it and return, and that he would welcome him with more joy than one who had never been astray. Now one cannot look at a scene of that kind and say that that father had pleasure in the want and in the death of his boy. One could not look at that welcome and say that the reason the boy was in such deplorable condition was that his father's mind was hostile to him.

And it is when we look to God as He is manifested in Jesus Christ that we can see why God should speak with such earnestness as is expressed in the text before us. Jesus of Nazareth have pleasure in the death of the wicked! Jesus of Nazareth leave men to perish when He could as easily save them as He could move His finger! Jesus of Nazareth, who could not suffer a reproof to a mother bringing to Him her infant that He might lay His hands upon it, and bless it! Jesus of Nazareth, who could not see the widow and her dead son, without His heart being moved

and melted with compassion! Jesus of Nazareth, who could not hear the blind man crying to Him for sight without stopping the procession of His triumphal entry, and calling for the man to be brought to Him! Jesus of Nazareth, who, when He felt the bloody sweat drop from His brow, in the terrific agonies of the curse that was wringing His heart, and said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," had love enough for the souls for whom He had died to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done"—and who took that cup and held it to His lips until He could say, "It is finished," and bowed His head, and died. Jesus of Nazareth having pleasure in the death of the wicked! If we take God as He is seen in Christ, and understand Him as He is there seen, we can have no difficulty in perceiving how natural and reasonable it was that He should send a message like this to a people, like the Jews in Ezekiel's time, who complained that they could not help themselves, and that God could help them, but did not care to do so.

¶ The battle is virtually won if you come to believe that in Jesus of Nazareth God was manifested in the flesh, and that it is your first and highest duty to bow before Him with penitence for your sin and trust in His mercy. And I can promise you, on the strength of the experience of one who, like yourselves, once saw his early faith covered with a boundless sea of darkness, that if you once reach a firm belief in this fundamental fact, the waters shall some day begin to ebb—shall drain down to the depths whence they came; and, as the flood retires, that solitary truth—the manifestation of God in the person of Christ—shall gradually be surrounded by province after province of Divine revelation, beautiful with fresh verdure and pleasant streams, and rich with yellow harvests; and, hidden deep beneath the soil, there shall be a secret treasure of wisdom and of joy: the gold and the crystal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold.[1]

It is the greatness of Thy love, dear Lord, that we would celebrate
With sevenfold powers.
Our love at best is cold and poor, at best unseemly for Thy state,
This best of ours.

[1] R. W. Dale, *From Doubt to Faith* (Exeter Hall Lectures, 1864), 12.

Creatures that die, we yet are such as Thine own hands
deigned to create:
We frail as flowers,
We bitter bondslaves ransomed at a price incomparably great
To grace Heaven's bowers.

Thou callest: "Come at once"—and still Thou callest us:
"Come late, tho' late"—
(The moments fly)—
"Come, every one that thirsteth, come"—"Come prove Me,
knocking at My gate"—
(Some souls draw nigh!)—
"Come thou who waiting seekest Me"—"Come thou for whom
I seek and wait"—
(Why will we die?)—
"Come and repent: come and amend: come joy the joys
unsatiate"—
—(Christ passeth by . . .)—
Lord, pass not by—I come—and I—and I.[1]

II.

A Divine Appeal.

"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways."

The declaration of the text that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked is followed by the converse statement that God's desire is that the wicked should turn from his way and live. An urgent appeal is then made to the sinner, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." This importunity on the part of God proves yet more fully His real desire. It is like one vehemently enforcing an invitation upon an unwilling listener, making a last effort to save the heedless or resisting. He lifts up His voice; He stretches out His hand; He exhorts; He commands; He expostulates; He entreats, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." Must not He who thus reasons and remonstrates, repeating and re-repeating His entreaty, enforcing and urging home His message with every kind of loving argument, as well as with every form of solemn appeal,—must

[1] Christina G. Rossetti, *Some Feasts and Fasts.*

not He be truly in earnest in His desire for the salvation of the sinner?

1. What is the turning from our evil ways which is here signified? It is not shedding a few tears of sorrow and remorse. It is not forming a few serious resolutions. It is not leaving off a few bad practices. It is not attending to religious duties more constantly, or more strictly, than formerly. By the expression "turning from our evil ways" is meant a deep and total change of the heart and life, a conversion of the whole soul, a turning from sin to God. The person who is turned from his evil ways is a "new creature"; he has a new heart and a new spirit: "old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." He has new desires and dispositions, and these lead him to walk in newness of life; so that henceforth he proves, in a manner which cannot be mistaken, that he has indeed turned out of "the broad road of destruction" into "the narrow way that leadeth unto life."

¶ A young soldier, who had led a careless life, but had become afterwards a Christian, described very well the change that had been wrought in him when he said—"Jesus Christ said to me, Right about face! And I heard and obeyed Him in my heart." That is exactly what we call "conversion." It is a turning-about of the face—from the world to God. But with the face it is a turning also of the heart.[1]

2. The life which forms the termination of the one way is as certain as the death which forms the termination of the other. It is in the way of life that God so earnestly desires to see men walking. However far astray they have gone, and however near the confines of the second death they may have come, He beckons them back with His gracious hand, and beseeches them with His most loving voice, "Come now, and let us reason together." Nay, more, He commands them to turn. It is not mere liberty to retrace their steps that He gives them; He lays His command upon them; and it is at their peril that they disobey. "Am I at liberty to come to God?" one asks perhaps. At liberty to come! Is that the way to put it? At liberty to obey His direct command! One dare not do otherwise! There is all the obliga-

[1] C. A. Salmond, *For Days of Youth*, 42.

tion that a command can give; there is a necessity laid upon us, an immediate necessity, a necessity from which nothing can loose us, a necessity arising out of the very righteousness of that God who is commanding us to quit our unrighteousness, a necessity springing from the certain doom that awaits us if we turn not.

¶ God perceives His poor creature standing with his back to Him, looking to idols, looking to sinful pleasures, looking towards the city of destruction, and what does God say to him? He says, "Turn!" It is a very plain direction; is it not? "Turn," or "Right about face!" That is all. "I thought," saith one, "I was to feel so much anguish and so much agony." I should not wonder if you do feel it, but all that God says is, "Turn." You now face the wrong way; "Turn," and face the right way. That turning is true repentance. A changed life is of the essence of repentance; and that must spring from a changed heart, from a changed desire, from a changed will.[1]

3. When man is posting on to death, God, as it were, follows after him, and, standing in the way before him, He spreads out His hands of entreaty, crying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." God knows the awful fate that awaits the transgressor—a fate to which the transgressor himself is often hastening blindly—and He warns him and pleads with him. He appeals to his reason, to his conscience, to his affections. How deeply affecting is the anxiety of God on man's behalf! Cold is the heart that can resist His tender entreaty. What is the warmest human appeal compared with the appeal of God to man? But powerful as that appeal is, it is an appeal and nothing more. God does not compel the will. His influence upon men is suasive. Heaven persuades; man decrees. The appeal of God is to the free and rational nature of man. Man is not the victim of fate. He is not the creature of circumstances. He can get the better of his environment. The powers of evil which have gotten hold of him may be conquered. It lies with himself to decide whether he will die or live. His power of self-action is here appealed to. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." Why rush on to ruin when you can turn and live? Why perish in sin when the Good Physician is standing near and asking, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The choice of the will is the fiat of destiny.

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

¶ We talk about the power of the will, but no effort of will can obliterate the life that we have lived, or add a cubit to our stature; we cannot abrogate any law of nature, or destroy a single atom of matter. What it seems that we can do with the will is to make a certain choice, to select a certain line, to combine existing forces, to use them within very small limits. We can oblige ourselves to take a certain course, when every other inclination is reluctant to do it. Any one who will deliberately test his will, will find that it is stronger than he suspects; what often weakens our use of it is that we are so apt to look beyond the immediate difficulty into a long perspective of imagined obstacles, and to say within ourselves, "Yes, I may perhaps achieve this immediate step, but I cannot take step after step—my courage will fail!" Yet if one does make the immediate effort, it is common to find the whole range of obstacles modified by the single act; and thus the first step towards the attainment of serenity of life is to practise cutting off the vista of possible contingencies from our view, and to create a habit of dealing with a case as it occurs.[1]

¶ Amiel is a classical instance of the man in whom culture or knowledge has weakened certain elementary powers, faiths, instincts, in the absence of which, nevertheless, a man ceases to be himself. He will not commit himself in any particular case—he sees so much on the other side and on all sides. He will not apply himself to one thing—there are in this world so many things. Now, if in any urgent matter, either of duty or of faith, a man refuses to *act*, to make a personal choice, simply because there are so many facts and circumstances in the world which if he only knew them all might lead him to act differently, or refrain from acting altogether, that man is going against the ordinary practice of life in every region. . . . Just as by an act of your will, if need be, and in order to read this page, you must for the moment neglect the entire world, and confine yourself to the type and to the play of ideas and associations which it awakens in your mind; and by so doing—so far as this present moment is concerned—you live and assert yourself. So, in all personal matters which involve choice, judgment, decision, in matters of life or of faith, what you shall do, how you shall believe, it is necessary, when face to face with your question, to put away things which are obviously extraneous, and, with what wisdom you have, deal with the issue within narrower limits.[2]

[1] A. C. Benson, *Where No Fear Was* (1914), 229, 232.
[2] J. A. Hutton, *Pilgrims in the Region of Faith*, 47.

III.

A Divine Expostulation.

"Why will ye die?"

1. The text concludes with an expostulation. Man as a sinner is in danger of eternal death. To the first man that ever lived the warning was given, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," or, "dying thou shalt die"; that is, the act of disobedience in eating of the forbidden fruit would plant within him the seed of death, and he would become a dying man. Sin and death are cause and effect. As the seed contains the germ of the future flower, sin contains the germ of spiritual death. When once a person has been bitten by a venomous serpent he is a dying man. The surface wound may be very slight, and no danger may be apprehended, but the poison has got into the blood, and it will quickly search its way to the very centre and fountain of life. It is therefore no mere figure of speech to say that any one who is harbouring sin in his soul is a dying man. If the poison of sin is not neutralized it will surely work his eternal ruin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." It dies by sinning. God has so made it that the wages of its sin are its death. This terrible law permits of no break. It may be met, counteracted, forestalled, arrested; its accumulated curse, gathered through the increasing guilt of the crowded past, may be diverted, transmuted, absorbed, transcended, but the thing that can never be is that it should be denied, abolished, prohibited, suspended. Man has deeply sinned, and, as deeply sinning, he must be subject to the inevitable law which God cannot repudiate without repudiating the reason, and the will, and the love with which He created him.

2. The death here spoken of is not the death of the body, for that is something which is inevitable. "It is appointed unto men once to die." To the law of death there is no exception. Nothing can keep the earthly house of this tabernacle from breaking up. But there is something more terrible than the death of the body, and that is the death of the soul—the death

of goodness, the death of hope, the death of noble aspiration, the death of all desire for a better life. Whittier says:

When faith is lost, when honour dies,
The man is dead.

Now the death of the soul, which the Bible calls the second death, is not inevitable like the death of the body. No man has control over the death of the body, but every man has control over the death of the soul. Sinners die because they will to die; not because God wills their death. Not that they deliberately choose death as an end, but they choose the way that leads to it. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

¶ Human nature *is* corrupt—too sorrowfully and deeply so. What you have first to perceive concerning it is exactly *that*—namely, that all the evil of it *is* its corruption, not itself! That our sin is our Death; not our Nature, but the destruction of our Nature. And that through and within all such horror of infected plague, the living soul, holy and strong, yet exists, strong enough with its Maker's help to purge and burn itself free, to all practical need, from the body of that death, and rise up in its ancient noblesse, overflowing in strength and zealous of good works.[1]

3. The death of the soul is not a necessity, for an antidote has been provided. Those who have within them the sentence of death may feel the quickening touch of Christ and begin to live. It was the mission of Christ to bring life to dying men. "I am come," He says, "that they might have life." And Paul, writing to the Christians at Ephesus of the power of Christ, says: "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." When a sick man has an efficacious remedy placed before him there is no reason why he should die. And yet his disease may run to a fatal end if he refuses to take the remedy provided. Sinful men die, not because they are sinners, but because they refuse the remedy which Heaven has provided for sin.

God in Christ does not forget even where a father might forget, or forsake even where a mother might be found forsaking. No, He will defer judgment, He will delay the crisis, He will set Himself to forestall the doom that must work itself out as the

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* (Appendix, No. 24).

issue of sin. God willed that none should perish; He willed that all should be summed up in Christ, and that to be in Christ should have force to rescue, cleanse, renew, and glorify the entire body of mankind, and even if at last there will be found a residue of stubborn defiance in the human will which can hold out against the fullest effort even of Divine pardon, yet that will be only through wilful refusal to suffer the whole will of God to make itself felt. Still it will remain true that the intention, the purpose, the hope of God is that in Christ every soul should be brought to salvation. And if so, we must not sink the scale because the hope seems to us so distant and so broken, we must measure the Father's actions according to the width and breadth of His perfect scheme.

Austere as we must be against sin, we will still remember that Christ died for sinners; that unless they hear Him they will die; and if, at some darker hour, our hearts sink as we wonder whether anything is achieved, whether it can be worth while to wait and trust, then let us remind ourselves that we have no gauge by which to measure the gains and the losses. We are not in a position to estimate God's winnings, for we know not yet what we shall be hereafter, we know not what God may have in store; and, in view of that hereafter hidden from our eyes, He may well be gaining more than we think out of this dark, chaotic probation on earth. For God gains, let us remember, if only He can save a soul from the deliberate recoil from holiness which makes the case desperate; He gains, if only He can secure in a soul that its deepest wish, its last core of will, has yet something in it of belief in goodness, of appeal to God, some inner motion at its root which issues at last out of life's trials into the other world with an upward and not a downward tendency. If only He can win that, then there are at least some possibilities hereafter, there is something secured which the discipline and purging of spiritual penitence can cherish and quicken, and the soul, it may be, may be saved "though as by fire," though "with many stripes."

¶ Salvation must be as freely accepted by man as it is offered by God. We find men in this life so defiant of goodness and grace that we cannot assert that final impenitence is impossible. The grace of God in Christ now appears so sufficient, so urgent,

so final that we cannot conceive what more God can do to save man. We may desire and hope that all shall be saved, but we cannot assert the salvation of all, and must recognize the possibility of a final impenitence. We must leave the issue of God's world to God's wisdom, holiness, and grace.[1]

¶ If there be a Divine purpose for mankind, its universality must either be something real or something nominal. If nominal only, then the universal offer of benefits that are not intended for all becomes a solemn farce, "inconsistent with the truthfulness and goodness of God," an impossible creed which no honest man can proclaim to his fellow-men. Both Wesley and Erskine taught that the benefits of grace, as they ought to be fully and freely offered to mankind, are also intended for mankind, and to a certain extent are really and truly bestowed on mankind. "As through one trespass the justification came unto all men to condemnation, so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life." Erskine's interpretation of these words is, that as every man has been born into an order of sin, so every man is born into an order of grace; or, to put it otherwise, as Adam inflicted on the world a sentence of death, so Christ has brought a universal seed of life into the world which is available for all those who do not reject it.[2]

¶ Dr. William Taylor, of America, tells how, when he was a boy, he once heard a sermon on "appropriating faith." His first question on getting home was, "Father, what is appropriating faith?"—a circumstance not very complimentary to the preacher. His father replied, "My boy, take your Bible and underline all the *me's* and *my's* and the *mine's*, and you will soon find out what 'appropriating faith' is."

If the *me's*, *my's*, and *mine's* were underscored in Charles and John Wesley's hymns, it would show better than anything else the intense personal force behind the Great Revival.

And out of the glow of Experience came Evangelism. With the early Methodist it was only one step from "*me*" to the "*world*." With deep and reverent faith he would sing—

> Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
> Which at the mercy seat of God,
> For ever doth for sinners plead,
> For *me*, even for *my soul* was shed.

But instantly the mind flings itself out to the uttermost limits

[1] A. E. Garvie, *A Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 220.
[2] H. F. Henderson, *Erskine of Linlathen*, 57.

of the human race. The gift received is a gift for all, and the missionary spirit of Methodism finds glorious expression in the very next stanza—

> Lord, I believe were sinners more
> Than sands upon the ocean shore,
> Thou hast for *all* a ransom paid,
> For *all* a full atonement made.[1]

[1] W. B. Fitzgerald, *The Roots of Methodism*, 180.

A New Heart.

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A New Heart.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.—Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

1. God deals with nations much as He deals with individuals. We may read the Old Testament as addressed to the many or to the one. Very often a man stood for his tribe or class; often the whole were regarded, irrespective of the doing of the few or of the single soul. A nation was looked on as having a character, and a heart, just as much as a person. It was held to be as strictly accountable for its conduct as any member of the body politic for the exercise of his powers. In this chapter the prophet is speaking to Israel. Colossal sins, grossest idolatries, shameful infidelities, had been long persisted in. Warnings, faithful and constant, had been uttered by the servants of Jehovah, only to be ridiculed and disregarded. At length the cup of the nation's iniquities was full. Affliction, sad and terrible, came. War and pillage, famine and pestilence, and finally captivity and exile, were their portion.

They became indeed "a nation scattered and peeled." They were a shepherdless flock now, in the "cloudy and dark day." Victorious foes exulted over them, holding now in possession their "ancient high places." Heathen orgies were celebrated in the very shrines which they themselves had polluted, and the care and power of Jehovah over His "own people" were despised. To the sorrowing prophet on the distant plains of Chebar there had been given searching messages to be spoken to the false and wicked ones who had led the nation into impiety. The flaming vision of the cherubim had stirred Ezekiel to valiant witnessing. When judgment had wrought its purpose and the repentant were ready to serve the Lord, then the prophet's face was turned toward them in mercy. Of that blessed change and renewing we

have here the promise. It is like a sun-burst through thick and angry clouds that have been pouring their fury on the shuddering earth, which, scattering them, discloses a smiling landscape. The grand mountain ranges of his native land loom up before the imagination of Ezekiel now purified, glorified, and Jerusalem becomes again a praise in the earth. As the energizing cause of this return and restored condition of things, we have the distinct assurance of "a new heart" and "a new spirit" in the children of God.

2. In the verse preceding the text, Ezekiel speaks of the spiritual process of regeneration by which Israel is to be transformed into a true people of God. The prophet's analysis of the process of conversion is profoundly instructive, and anticipates to a remarkable degree the teaching of the New Testament. The first step in the process is the removal of the impurities contracted by past transgressions. This is represented under the figure of sprinkling with clean water, suggested by the ablutions or lustrations which are so common a feature of the Levitical ritual. The truth symbolized is the forgiveness of sins, the act of grace which takes away the effect of moral uncleanness as a barrier to fellowship with God. The second point is what is properly called regeneration, the giving of a new heart and spirit. The stony heart of the old nation, whose obduracy had dismayed so many prophets, making them feel that they had spent their labour for nought and in vain, shall be taken away, and instead of it they shall receive a heart of flesh, sensitive to spiritual influences and responsive to the Divine will. And to this is added in the third place the promise of the Spirit of God to be in them as the ruling principle of a new life of obedience to the law of God.

¶ The prominence of "heart" as a psychological term in the Bible and in other ancient books is due, doubtless, to the centrality of the physical organ which it primarily denotes, and which, according to the view of the ancients, bulked so much more in the human frame than the brain. Since, in Bible phrase, "the life is in the blood," that organ which forms the centre of the distribution of the blood must have the most important place in the whole system. By a very easy play of metaphor, therefore, "heart" came to signify the seat of man's collective energies, the focus of the personal life. As from the fleshly heart goes forth the blood

in which is the animal life, so from the heart of the human soul goes forth the entire mental and moral activity. By a sort of metaphorical anticipation of Harvey's famous discovery, the heart is also that to which all the actions of the human soul return. In the heart the soul is at home with itself, becomes conscious of its doing and suffering as its own. It is therefore the organ of conscience, of self-knowledge, and indeed of all knowledge. Now, because it is the focus of the personal life, in the "heart" lies the moral and religious condition of the man. Only what enters the heart forms a possession of moral worth, and only what comes from the heart is a moral production. On the one hand, therefore, the Bible places human depravity in the heart, because sin is a principle which has penetrated to the centre, and thence corrupts the whole circuit of life. On the other hand, it regards the heart as the sphere of Divine influences, the starting-point of all moral renovation. "A new heart will I give you."[1]

I.

A New Heart.

1. How wonderfully the Book of God proclaims the doctrine of the "new"! It speaks of a "new covenant," and a "new creature," and a "new song": it even asserts that there shall be "a new heaven and a new earth." It proclaims that He that sitteth upon the throne purposes to "make *all* things new." It is the unique claim of the gospel that it makes men new. It professes to alter character, not as all other religious and ethical systems in the world have done, by mere influence of reason or of motives, or by a discipline of the flesh; it professes to alter human character by altering human nature. It brings truth, indeed, to satisfy the reason, and powerful motives of every sort to tell upon the will, as well as law to stimulate the conscience; but in the very act of doing so, it pronounces all these external appliances to be utterly insufficient without a concurrent action of God from within the man. The real change it proclaims to be a change of "heart" or spiritual being; and that is the work of God.

¶ All men's attempts at the betterment of human nature begin from without, and the theory is that the work will deepen till it

[1] J. Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man*, 121.

reaches that which is within. They profess to emancipate the man from the grosser vices, trusting that the reform will go farther, that he will be brought under superior influences, and so be elevated in mind and heart. Theirs is an outward ointment for an inward disease—a bandage upon the skin to stay the bleeding of the heart. Miserable physicians are they all! Their remedies fail to eradicate the deep-seated maladies of humanity. God's way of dealing with men is the reverse. He begins within and works towards the exterior in due course. He is a mere quack who, seeing in a man the signs of disease, operates upon the symptoms, but never looks to the root of the mischief. It is very possible that by potent poisons an empiric may check unpleasing indications, and he may kill the man in doing so; but the wise physician looks to the fountain of the disease, and if it be possible to touch the core and centre of it, he leaves the symptoms to right themselves.[1]

2. The spiritual change indicated in the text is spoken of under the metaphor of the substitution of "an heart of flesh" for "*a stony heart*"—"stony," meaning hard, lacking sensitiveness to God's mystic touch, unresponsive to the calls Divine. Who that has a glimmer of insight into his own heart but will recognize that heart as "stony"? Bishop Lightfoot in pathetic apostrophe speaks of "my sullied heart," and he speaks for us all. John Bunyan, in his *Grace Abounding*, says, "I thought that every one had a better heart than I had: I could have changed hearts with anybody." A stone, to which the natural heart is compared, is a thing upon which one can make little impression—insensitive, cold and heavy, one can do nothing with it. It feels nothing; do what we may, it gives no response; so the heart of man is by nature irresponsive to God's love and to the gospel of His grace. It takes more than a knife to cut a stone; we may put a stone in water as long as we like, but the water does not penetrate it. The rock of the hills seems impervious to the wind, the rain, and the storm. Heat does not melt it; cold does not make it any harder; it is impenetrable. This world is like a petrifying spring, and the worldly heart is being petrified in its stream, and so grows harder and harder as the years roll on. Moreover, men harden themselves by their own sins. Every time a man sins it becomes more easy for him to sin again. As labour renders the hand hard,

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

so sin makes the heart callous, and each sin makes the stony heart yet more like adamant.

In contrast to this stony heart, God offers to give man "*an heart of flesh*," by which is meant a soft heart, an impressible heart, a sensitive heart, a heart which can feel, can be moved to shame, to repentance, to loathing of sin, to desiring, to seeking, to panting, to longing after God; a tender heart, a heart that does not require a thousand blows to move it, but, like flesh with its skin broken, feels the very faintest touch—such is the heart that the Holy Spirit creates in the children of God. It is a teachable heart, a heart willing to be guided, moulded, governed by the Divine will; a heart which, like young Samuel, cries, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth"; an obedient heart, ready to be run into the mould, plastic beneath the sacred hand, anxious to be conformed to the heavenly pattern.

As "flesh," the heart is no longer hard, obdurate, impenetrable to the genial influences of heaven. Once like a hard block of ice, it has now yielded to the beams of the sun, and been melted into flowing water. How it is moved now, by truths once felt no more than dews falling out of starry heavens, in soft silence upon the rugged rock! The heart of grace is endowed with a delicate sensibility, and vibrates to the slightest touch of a Saviour's fingers. How the truth of God affects it now! A stone no longer, it melts under the heavenly fire; a stone no longer, it bends beneath the hammer of the Word; no longer like the rugged rock on which rains and sunbeams were wasted, it receives the impression of God's power, and retains the footprints of His presence.

¶ Do not mistake natural tenderness for that heart of flesh which God gives. A heart of wax is soft, but it is not a heart of flesh. The softness of nature is not the sensitiveness of grace. Often some persons who are religiously sensitive are equally sensitive the other way, and, while you can influence them for good, others can as easily influence them for evil. Mere religious impressibility is not grace, it is nature alone. Some persons are like india-rubber, and every time you put your finger on them you leave a mark; but it is wasted time, because they get back into the old shape again as soon as you have done with them. I was preaching once in a certain city, and a very worthy but worldly man went out of the congregation while I was in the middle of

the sermon, the third sermon he had been hearing from me during the week. One who followed him out asked him why he left, and he frankly replied that he could not stand it any longer, "for," said he, "I must have become religious if I had heard that sermon through. I was nearly gone. I have been," added he, "like an india-rubber doll under this man, but when he goes away I shall get back into the old shape again."[1]

3. A new heart can come only as *the gift of God.* "I" will give you it, saith Jehovah. Can any man renew his own heart? Let a host of poor disappointed attempters tell us their doleful story. Nay, let each of us recount his own pitiful endeavours. Who can renew a heart but God only? Nor priest, nor prophet, nor friend can effect this miraculous transformation. God speaks without reservation. He says that He "will" give a new heart and that He will give it to "you." Not one of His people need know the deplorable impoverishment of being without this gift Divine. It is assured to all who desire it. God says, "I will," and yet again, "I will." It is not "I will if," or "I will perhaps," or "I will upon certain conditions," but—"I will give." He speaks in a Godlike tone. It is the very word of Him who of old said, "Let there be light" and there was light. He who spoke the world into being now speaks the new world of grace into being in the self-same majestic voice, which here promises the gift of a new heart.

¶ God called for my life and I offered it at His footstool; but He gave it me as a Prey, with unspeakable addition. He called for my will, and I resigned it at His call, but He returned me His own in token of His love. He called for the world and I laid it at His feet, with the crowns thereof; I withheld them not at the beckoning of His hand. But mark the benefit of Exchange! For He gave me, instead of Earth, a Kingdom of Eternal Peace, and in lieu of the Crowns of Vanity a Crown of Glory. . . . He gave me Joy which no tongue can express and Peace which passeth understanding. My heart was melted with the Height of Comfort; my Soul was immersed in the Depth of Love; my eyes overflowed with tears of greatest pleasure . . . I begged Himself and He gave me All.[2]

¶ Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

[2] *A Journal of the Life of Thomas Story*, 20.

frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterances ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.[1]

4. This gift which God promises is *something we all need.* We can do without anything else, but a new heart is absolutely requisite. A nature is fundamental. All acts, words, thoughts, are effluences of the nature. The heart is the root and fount of all things. With what finality and power our Lord described the fundamentality of the heart! "Out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings." How radical is the teaching of Jesus in this as in all matters! He never treats things superficially. He will not rest in second causes. He traces all evil to the heart of man. And the Bible is equally thorough in all its teachings. It focusses all attention, all prayer, all endeavour, upon the heart. It will not allow that any man is right except his heart be right. Always its deep solicitude is concerning the heart. Hence all manner and types of heart are described in Scripture: a "wicked heart," a "pure heart," a "true heart," a "broken heart," a "clean heart," a "perfect heart." "A new heart also will I give you." A needed gift indeed, for till the heart is rectified the life is all astray.

In this precious gift of a new heart lies the secret of a wealthy inner life. Inward peace depends upon a new heart. Self-negation depends upon a new heart. Prayer and thanksgiving and praise depend upon a new heart. All generous impulses, all sublime ideals, all lofty and strenuous purposes depend upon a new heart. No inward rightness can be attained unless God's promised gift of a new heart be received.

¶ Mr. M'Cullagh's *Recollections of my Ministry in East London* contains an account of two or three remarkable conversions which followed his mission sermons in Poplar and Limehouse.

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), 1.

At one service a stranger presented himself as a penitent. He complained that he did not and could not "feel." "I have a great stone here," said he, putting his hand on his breast. He was reasoned with in vain. He repeated several times his complaint of "the stone." Then the preacher quoted to him the promise to take away the stony heart. The man could not believe it was in the Bible, until a copy was shown to him, for it seemed as though made to suit his case exactly. He, too, believed and entered into rest.[1]

¶ Describing some of the remarkable conversions among the boatmen who had been induced to attend his Water Street Mission in New York, Jerry McAuley says, "I asked one of them who was saved at that time, when he was testifying, 'How do you know you were converted?'

"'Well, I'll tell you,' he replied: 'I went from here to my boat, and, locking the door, just made up my mind never to open it until converted. *And I kept my word!*'

"'How could you tell when it was done?'

"'Well, I'll have to explain that in my own way,' he answered, 'but it seems to me the Lord just took, as it were, something like a barnacle-scraper [a keen, sharp-edged, three-cornered piece of steel, fastened to a long handle, and used to scrape off the shell-fish and other deposits that gather on the bottom of vessels] and *scraped my heart all out clean*, and I haven't felt anything wrong there since!'"[2]

¶ That rare thing, the real Christian, is a genuinely new creation; not an ordinary man with a new and inspiring creed. "If any man be in Christ, he is a *new* creature," said St. Paul; and described in those words a most actual phenomenon, the perennial puzzle of the religious psychologist. The re-birth which is typified by the Church's sacrament of initiation, and the participation in the Divine Life which is dramatized in its sacrament of communion—"the food of the full-grown"—these are facts, these are things which really happen to Christian mystics; to all those, in fact, who follow this path of development, whatsoever their theological creed. The authentic documents of Christianity—those produced by minds which have submitted to the discipline and experienced the growth—speak with no uncertain voice as to the actual and unique character of this life. Its result, they say, is no splitting up of personality, no isolation of the "spiritual sense"; but the lifting of the *whole man* to new levels of existence "where the soul has fulhead of perception by divine

[1] *Thomas M'Cullagh*, by his eldest Son, 81.

[2] *Jerry McAuley: An Apostle to the Lost*, 75.

fruition"; where he not only knows, but *is*, not only is, but *acts*. "My life," said St. Augustine, looking forward to that existence in God which he recognized as his destiny, "shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee." "The naked will," says Ruysbroeck of that same consummation, "is transformed by the Eternal Love, as fire by fire. The naked spirit stands erect, it feels itself to be wrapped round, affirmed and affixed by the formless immensity of God," since "our being, *without losing anything of its personality*, is united with the Divine Truth which respects all diversity." Here is the authentic voice of Western mysticism; and here we indeed recognize spirit pressing forward in a new direction towards new conquests, bringing into expression deeper and deeper levels of life.[1]

II.

A New Spirit.

The gospel claims to make human nature new. This is to recognize what no other religion ever recognized, but what all experience demonstrates—that less than this is not enough. Out of the fact of the Incarnation springs the hope of our renewal. God now is not outside of mankind, but inside. From the inside He can work, and does work, renewingly. The race has within itself a Fountain of renewal, an endless, unfathomable Source of re-creating energy.

1. The text reveals to us how God effects the great change that is promised under the figure of a new heart. "I will put my spirit within you." The new life-principle is the effluence of the Spirit of God. The promise does not offer merely the influence of a Divine spirit, working on men as from without, or coming down upon them as an afflatus, but the actual planting of God's Spirit in the deep places of theirs. We fail to apprehend the most characteristic blessing of the gospel if we do not give full prominence to that great gift of an indwelling Spirit, the life of our lives. Cleansing is much, but it is incomplete without a new life-principle which shall keep us clean; and that can only be God's Spirit, enshrined and operative within us; for only thus shall we "walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments." When

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, 33.

the Lawgiver dwells in our hearts, the law will be our delight; and keeping it will be the natural outcome and expression of our life, which is His life.

¶ "Within you!" This word of our text is one of the key-words of the New Covenant. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it." "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." God created man's heart for His dwelling. Sin entered, and defiled it. Four thousand years God's Spirit strove and wrought to regain possession. In the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ the Redemption was accomplished, and the Kingdom of God established. Jesus could say, "The kingdom of God is come unto you"; "the kingdom of God is within you." It is within we must look for the fulfilment of the New Covenant, the Covenant not of ordinances but of life: in the power of an endless life the law and the fear of God are to be given in our heart, the Spirit of Christ Himself is to be within us as the power of our life. Not only on Calvary, or in the Resurrection, or on the throne, is the glory of Christ the Conqueror to be seen,—but in our heart: within us, within us is to be the true display of the reality and the glory of His Redemption.[1]

2. With a new life, cut off from the dreadful moral continuity with the past, eased of one's inheritance of self-reproach, and made quick within with the seed of a new future, all things seem possible to a man. The whole world changes when we change. Old things pass away; all things become new. But it is not in an instant that the old things pass away. Even to get a beginning made, and a seed of newness let into the old life through the first coming of the Holy Ghost, may ask long, sore waiting, with many tears and groans over the sins of the past, and an agony of wrestling desire, and a letting go of one's loved things, even of one's loved self, which is like the spasm of dissolution. And when the new heart begins to beat, and the new-won Holy Spirit begins to breathe in us, the young life must be fostered continually, and the Holy Spirit must not be grieved. The process of renewal in Christ Jesus is a work of every day. Every day the old has to become older and more obsolete; the new, newer and more mighty.

It is here that so many of us blunder. We think of regenera-

[1] A. Murray, *The Spirit of Christ*, 21.

tion as a *fait accompli*, a thing past and done; and we forget that "the inward man" needs to be "renewed day by day." No man can be a new creature except "in Christ"—within the circle of Christ's life and influence. Keep there, in that charmed circle, in personal intimacy with that Living One, and we are in the Life and in the Light; all is new, all is strength, sunshine, and gladness. Go out of it for an instant, and everything is cold and dark as death. But stay not out of it. At all cost get back to Jesus; eye to eye with Him, hand in hand, heart to heart. It is from Him the new being streams into us, and everything—yes, everything—must be sacrificed to have that contact maintained. Is it not worth it? To be one's old self, with one's old bondage, and spiritual incapacity, and dreary remorse, and vain struggles to be good, is to be dead. He alone lives who lives in Christ; and for that true life it is worth while to die to everything beside.

¶ As the self-expression of the Divine life in the world conforms to a rhythm too great for us to grasp, so that its manifestation appears to us erratic and unprepared; so is it with the self-expression, the emergence into the field of consciousness, of that fontal life of man which we have called the soul's spark or seed, which takes place in the spiritual adolescence. This emergence is seldom understood by the self in relation with life as a whole. It seems to him a separate gift or "grace," infused from without rather than developed from within. It startles him by its suddenness; the gladness, awe, and exaltation which it brings; an emotional inflorescence, parallel with that which announces the birth of perfect human love. This moment is the spiritual spring-time. It comes, like the winds of March, full of natural wonder, and gives to all who experience it a participation in the deathless magic of eternal springs. An enhanced vitality, a wonderful sense of power and joyful apprehension as towards worlds before ignored or unknown, floods the consciousness. Life is raised to a higher degree of tension than ever before; and therefore to a higher perception of Reality.[1]

¶ The feeling of God's forgiveness, the freedom from the sense of sin, prominent at the critical point in conversion, is one of the most frequently expressed characteristics of sanctification; but the form of expression has changed. While the former was a mere act of pardon, this is usually described as a complete cleansing. These are typical: "I felt pure and clean so that I wished I were made of glass, so that everyone could look within my heart." "I

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, 50.

had the witness of God's Spirit that a clean heart had been created within me." "Self-mastery and a real purification of my nature became manifest in me." The work of forgiveness seems to be more thorough; it involves one's entire being; the person feels not only that his sins have been forgiven, but that he has been made wholly pure.

The specific ways in which sanctification is a culmination of conversion are along the lines of the changes wrought then in one's nature. Evil habits are more completely broken up. For example: "At conversion I experienced pardon for sin, a new heart, a disposition to do right, although an evil tendency remained. Sanctification took away this tendency." The feeling of harmony with God is heightened. "Sanctification brought a fuller consciousness of the presence of the Holy Spirit." Sanctification brings with it a fulness, an all-aroundness of experience which is new. The joy at conversion has been enlarged so that it approaches a state of ecstasy in which one's whole nature participates. "I was cleansed from all sin and filled with the fulness of God as I had not been at conversion." "Conversion was a consecration to God; sanctification was an exalted state of soul, an indwelling of power." In these instances one sees the heightened subjectivity of experience which is one of the distinguishing aspects of sanctification.[1]

¶ For him, in this sensitiveness of surface and texture, there arose one of the perennially fresh springs of interest for every working day. No method was entirely satisfactory. There were ever fresh discoveries to be made, and the joy of for ever seeking made him glad to be up with the first streak of daylight. "Every day is a birthday, every moment of it is new to us," he said cheerfully; "we are born again, renewed for fresh work and endeavour." [2]

III.

A New Life.

1. When a man receives a new heart his temper and disposition are changed and sanctified. A kind, gentle, loving nature is one of the most winning features of religion; by its silent and softening influence one may do more real service to Christianity than by the loudest professions, or by the exhibition of a cold and

[1] E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, 379.
[2] *George Frederic Watts*, ii. 91.

rigid orthodoxy. The heart that has room in it for God grows so large that it finds room for all that He loves, and for all that He has made. While the love of sin acts as an astringent—contracting the natural heart, shutting and shrivelling it up—the love of God expands and enlarges its capacity. Piety quickens the pulse of love, warms and strengthens our heart, and sends forth fuller streams of natural affection toward all that have a claim on us, just as a strong and healthy heart sends tides of blood along the elastic arteries to every extremity of the body.

This new heart, however, consists mainly in a change of the affections as they regard spiritual objects. Just look at the heart and feelings of an unconverted man. His mind, being carnal, is enmity or hatred against God. This may be latent, not at first sight apparent or suspected, but how soon does it appear when put to the proof. Fairly tried, it comes out like those unseen elements which chemical tests reveal. Let God, for instance, by His providences or laws, thwart the wishes or cross the propensities of our renewed nature—let there be a collision between His will and ours—and the latent enmity flashes out like latent fire when the cold flint is struck with steel.

2. Conversion restores not only God to the heart, but also reason to her throne. Time and eternity are now seen in their just proportions—the one in its littleness, and the other in its greatness. When the light of heaven rises on the soul, what grand discoveries does she make—of the exceeding evil of sin, of the holiness of the Divine law, of the infinite purity of Divine justice, of the grace and greatness of Divine love. The Saviour and Satan, the soul and the body, holiness and sin, have competing claims. Between these reason now holds the balance even, and man finds what the demoniac found in Jesus' advent. The man whose dwelling was among the tombs, whom no chains could bind, is seated at the feet of Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind." By this change the will is renewed, changed, and sanctified. The attainments of a believer are always beneath his aims; his desires are nobler than his deeds; his wishes are holier than his works. Give other men their will, full swing to their passions, and they would be worse than they are; give that to him, and he would be better than he is. And if we have experienced the gracious change it will be

our daily grief that we are not what we know we should be, nor even what we wish to be. To be complaining with Paul, "When I would do good, evil is present with me"; "the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do," is one of the best evidences of a gracious, saving change.

3. It has been said, change the man and you change his world. The new self will make all around it as good as new, though no actual change should pass on it; for, to a very wonderful extent, a man creates his own world. We project the hue of our own spirits on things outside. A bright and cheerful temper sees all things on their sunny side. A weary, uneasy mind drapes the very earth in gloom. Lift from a man his load of inward anxiety, and the aspect of the universe is changed to that man; for, if "to the pure all things are pure," it is no less true that to the happy all things are happy. Especially is the world revolutionized and made new to a man by a noble and joyous passion. Any great enthusiasm which lifts a man above his average self for the time makes him like a new man, and transfigures the universe in his eyes. Now, this power of human nature, when exalted through high and noble emotion, to make its own world, will be realized in its profoundest form when the soul is re-created by the free Spirit of God. Let God lift us above our old selves, and inspire us with no earthly, but with the pure flame of a celestial, devotion; let Him breathe into our hearts the noblest, freest of all enthusiasms, the enthusiasm for Himself; and to us all things will become new. We shall seem to ourselves to have entered another world where we breathe lighter air, see an intenser sunlight, and move to the impulses of a more generous spirit.

¶ One peculiarity of the assurance state is the objective change which the world often appears to undergo. "An appearance of newness beautifies every object," the precise opposite of that other sort of newness, that dreadful unreality and strangeness in the appearance of the world, which is experienced by melancholy patients. This sense of clean and beautiful newness within and without is one of the commonest entries in conversion records. Jonathan Edwards thus describes it in himself:—

"After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to

be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity, and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, and trees; in the water and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning; formerly nothing had been so terrible to me. Before, I used to be uncommonly terrified with thunder, and to be struck with terror when I saw a thunderstorm rising; but now, on the contrary, it rejoices me."[1]

¶ Billy Bray, the Cornish evangelist, whose wonderful work in the West of England is well known, speaks thus of the sense of newness that he experienced on his conversion:—"I said to the Lord: 'Thou hast said, they that ask shall receive, they that seek shall find, and to them that knock the door shall be opened, and I have faith to believe it.' In an instant the Lord made me so happy that I cannot express what I felt. I shouted for joy. I preached God with my whole heart. . . . I think this was in November, 1823, but what day of the month I do not know. I remember this, that everything looked new to me, the people, the fields, the cattle, the trees. I was like a new man in a new world. I spent the greater part of my time in praising the Lord."[2]

O glory of the lighted mind
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
The station brook, to my new eyes,
Was babbling out of Paradise,
The waters rushing from the rain
Were singing Christ has risen again.
I thought all earthly creatures knelt
From rapture of the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,
The wild hop withering in the hedge,
The lights in huntsman's upper storey,
Were parts of an eternal glory,
Were God's eternal garden flowers.
I stood in bliss at this for hours.[3]

[1] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 248.
[2] F. W. Bourne, *The King's Son—A Memoir of Billy Bray*, 9.
[3] John Masefield, *The Everlasting Mercy*, 97.

Life from the Dead.

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Life from the Dead.

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.—Ezek. xxxvii. 3.

1. There is perhaps no passage in all the Bible which, for weird imaginative power, surpasses Ezekiel's Vision of Dry Bones. By means that are as simple as simple can be, he transports us into a veritable valley of death, and the gloom and the horror of it enter our souls. We shall let the prophet himself lead us into the valley, and tell us what he saw, and how he felt, and what the vision did for him. This is the story in his own words, with something of their muffled music:

Jehovah touched me with His mighty hand,
And bore me in the spirit to a valley,
And in the midst thereof He set me down,
And it was full of bones; and round and round
Among the bones He led me. And, behold!
Thickly they lay upon the valley's face,
Exceeding many and exceeding dry.
Then thus He spake to me: "O child of man!
Can these bones live?" "O Lord," I said, "Thou knowest."
"Lift up thy voice," He said, "and prophesy
Upon these bones, and in these words address them:
'Ye dry bones, listen to Jehovah's word.'
Thus saith Jehovah to these bones, 'Behold!
I will breathe into you the breath of life,
Sinews and flesh will I bring up on you,
And I will cover you with skin, and put
The breath of life in you: then ye shall know
That I am God the Lord Omnipotent.'"
Straightway I prophesied as I was bidden,
And, as I prophesied, behold! a shaking!
Each several bone drew near unto his fellow.
And, as I gazed, behold! there came upon them
Sinews and flesh and skin to cover them.

But still within them was no breath of life.
"Lift up thy voice," He said, "and prophesy.
Speak to the wind, thou child of man, and say,
'Thus saith the Lord Omnipotent: O wind!
Come hither from all quarters of the heavens,
And breathe upon these slain that they may live.'"
So then I prophesied as He had bade me,
And into them there came the breath of life;
As living men, they stood upon their feet—
A mighty host and great exceedingly.[1]

This picture is not drawn from the *Divina Commedia* of Italy's favourite poet; it is not a reproduction of any of Lord Leighton's works; it is a canvas from an older collection of paintings, so often stowed away, neglected, and forgotten amid the dust of the cellars of the world's academies and picture-galleries. Nevertheless, even to those possessed simply of artistic feeling, devoid of sentiment or religious spirit, there is a pathos and beauty contained in these words of the prophet Ezekiel which it would be difficult to surpass, or even to equal.

2. Like many other visions, before and since, Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones was partly shaped by the circumstances of the times. The horrors of the Chaldæan invasion, which had resulted in the carrying away of the Jewish people into Babylon, were still fresh in the memories of men. In many a valley, on many a hillside, in southern Palestine, the track of the invading army, as it advanced and retired, would have been marked by the bones of the unoffending but slaughtered peasantry. In his work on Nineveh, Mr. Layard describes such a scene in Armenia—an upland valley covered by the bones of a Christian population which had been plundered and murdered by the Kurds.

¶ A page from the "Annals" of Tacitus throws the light of an illustration on the imagery of this chapter. The Roman historian relates a gruesome incident in the march of one of the imperial armies through the forests of Germany. Some years before, Varus, a Roman general, had been entrapped and cut off there with his whole force by the barbarians. The succeeding general, having marched his troops into the heart of the country, came one day upon a large open camp which was whitened all over

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The City with Foundations*, 73.

with a vast array of human bones. It struck with a chill upon the minds of the commander and of his men that these were the bones of their precursors—the remains of their friends and fellow-countrymen who had perished some years before upon that very spot.[1]

3. What does the vision treat of? Life and death, in their barest, most glaring contrast; life and death, and the way in which the one is to pass into the other; life and death, and the huge gulf between them, and how that gulf is to be bridged over; life and death, with their unfathomable mysteries and their world-pervading power.

Life and death! They compass us on every side: whithersoever we cast our eyes we see the workings of one or the other; we see them perpetually battling and struggling and wrestling, and now one gains the mastery, now the other. But what they are in themselves we know not. No eye of man has ever seen either. No foot of man has ever reached the hidden cave in which either of them dwells, the dark fountains from which they spring.

There are three facts in Ezekiel's vision, each necessary to the complete picture—

I. Dry Bones.
II. A Living Prophet.
III. A Life-Giving God.

I.

Dry Bones.

The prophet is borne upon the wings of his imagination to a valley filled with human bones—weird, gruesome, chaotic; for they are not even skeletons, but an indiscriminate mass of bones. No prospect could have been more forlorn or unpromising. There they lie, sad emblem of a hopeless, lifeless people—the living dead.

It was the scene of so many visions, the valley by the river Chebar. Now it wore a hideous face. It seemed a valley of desolation. It was a vast charnel-house. A skeleton army to

[1] J. Laidlaw, *Studies in the Parables*, 207.

Ezekiel's vision lay there, ghastly, not with the fresh horror of festering corruption, but with the gaunt squalor of dry ruin. The plain was white with the chronic leprosy of death. And it was the chill of old death, death grown grey and sere, death itself turned dead, because it was death with its beauty dead, its pathos dead, death not redolent of life just gone, but long hopeless of any life to come; it was death long settled down into dismal possession, death established, privileged, throned, and secure.

Round and round the valley the prophet is led by his mysterious guide, the only living man in the grim silent valley. And everywhere are bones—the face of the valley is thick with them, so many that the soil beneath them does not peer through; bones exceeding many and exceeding dry. Dry—for it is long, long, since the warm sap of life was about them; and they are so shrivelled and wizened that nothing but a miracle can ever bring the life about them again. "Behold!" says the prophet sadly, casting his despondent glance upon them, as he moves about the valley—"Behold them—exceeding many and exceeding dry."

1. What do these dry bones represent in the world to-day?

(1) There are spiritual dry bones and desolations among the nations. Other armies than those of emperors and kings assault the soul of a people, and indeed they are always with us. The Lord of them all is Covetousness, and his Queen is the Pride of Life. Their daughters are many—Corruption, Cruelty, Luxury, Lust, Thoughtlessness, Idleness, Extravagance, Gambling, Accumulation, Satiety, Hopelessness, Violence, Boasting, Division—a host of dreadful creatures who feed on the vitals of the people. To slay their father is to slay them all. To let him live in power is to scatter and blast the nation as the simoom blasts and dispels the caravan. And when we look round on England, Europe, and America, we see Covetousness, like Satan, throned; and his foul hand has gripped the nations. The cry of "More, more," goes up, a monstrous prayer, to the listening ear of God; and God's answer is that we will *always* live on the edge of war till we go to the root of the matter and dethrone Covetousness. Though every nation were to cry for peace, and every ruler to ask disarmament, and a hundred Peace Congresses to meet, we shall never make one step forward towards that true peace which is founded

on giving that unites, not on greed that disunites. That is not the peace which the societies of earth desire at present. The peace they want now has other aims than the desire of brotherhood. It is peace for the further development of the greed of wealth—that is, for the fruitful source of jealousies, hatred, and envy, injustice, cruelty, and dissension. The result of such a selfish peace is certain to be war; and this natural result is the punishment which the law of God's universe exacts for greed. Till the greed ceases the punishment will continue.

¶ The man who accumulates that he may keep, or who piles up all the goods he can that he may enjoy them himself, who distributes nothing, he is the covetous man; he is the man whom the parable sketches in so bold an outline. "I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there"—that I alone may have my ease in self-enjoyment—"will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." This is the man whom God condemns. But the Bible calls the man not only immoral but also a fool. Why? Because there is an inevitable power whose force he does not think of: Death. "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

In God's name, what do you gain by a life of voluptuous self-indulgence? You have gained, at a vast expense of time, that slothfulness of heart which eludes the difficulties of life and refuses its commonest burdens; that indifference which sneers at enthusiasm as foolish, reverence as ridiculous, admiration as vulgar; that restless activity which spends on the pursuit of pleasure the energies of immortality. A life of this kind is slavery. Better to be poor as the poorest than such a pitiable ruin of humanity. The world may flatter the selfish man. He may win his way to a higher place in society year by year, but Christ's word holds true—at best he is a fool, at worst he is degraded.

Rich towards God! Surely it is time for some of us to think of that! The night is far spent; the day is at hand when all the scenery of life will be changed, and a new world open on us. What treasure have we laid up for our existence there? Nothing but eternal things are wealth in that far-off land, and we cannot win these without surrendering what is transient. The happiness of the man who lives for mere self-interest here is in accumulation. The blessedness of the man who lives for God is in distribution.[1]

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

(2) Many of our people lie scattered and dry in the valley of ruin. They have lost reverence and love for the spiritual powers by which a nation lives. Justice is an interloper, love of man sentimentality, pity a scientific error, simplicity of life a folly, honesty—save where it is good policy—a mistake, honour a weakness, faith in good laughable, the pursuit of the ideal madness, love of beauty incomprehensible, sacrifice of self for others undue interference with the laws of nature, and truth unwise, and not to worship the God of Getting-on irreligious, blasphemous, atheistic. These folk are the dry and fleshless bones of the dead in this country, unhappy victims of the cancer of nations. We might leave them to their death were it not that the dry-rot in them infects others with their disease, and were it not that pity for their miserable fate wakens in all who love mankind. "Son of man," we hear, "can these dry bones live?" Is all England to take this turn to death? Is there to be no resurrection for this great people, none from the death of greed into the life of self-giving?

¶ Mrs. Forbes Julian's journal for 1901 contains an account of a visit that she and her husband paid to America in that year. "We were sometimes amused," she writes, "by the references made to the price of things by a few of the less refined visitors at the various hotels in New York.

"'That's my automobile. It cost fifteen thousand dollars (£3000). It has all solid silver fittings,' was the remark of a lady, a total stranger, as she pointed out her motor-car to me from our hotel window. She also gave us a list of her jewellery, and informed us of the price of several ornaments she was wearing at the time, and whenever we met her on several other occasions she volunteered information about her diamonds and other precious stones, with a profusion of which she was always decorated. On our being anxious to escape the recital on one occasion, and my husband saying that he thought it was getting late, her daughter remarked, 'I guess I can tell you the time,' and we then noticed that she was wearing three watches. She kindly explained that 'she was terribly fond of watches,' and possessed seventy.

"Finding both these ladies very good-natured when we knew them better, we tried to interest them in the case of a poor and deserving woman whose husband was ill, and who was anxious to get work for herself, to support him and her children. We mentioned that the case was a genuine one, as we knew of it

through an American friend, Mrs. Carroll, and a German friend, Countess von B—— (a cousin of Humboldt), who was engaged in philanthropic church settlement work in New York. We hoped we had persuaded the millionairess to employ our poor seamstress, but I unluckily added that when she worked for Mrs. Carroll or myself we paid her tram fares, as she lived in a remote and cheap part of the city. On hearing this, the poor possessor of all this wealth (for I think she was poor in all but her banking account) exclaimed, 'Is that so? I call that just extortion. She'll have no car fares from me. Why no, I guess I won't employ her.' The fares in question amounted to ten cents, about 5d. of our money."[1]

(3) But the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision may be discovered, and that not seldom, within the human soul. When a soul has lost its hold on truth or grace, when it has ceased to believe, or ceased to love, all the traces of what it once has been do not forthwith disappear. There are survivals of the old believing life —fragments of the skeleton of the old convictions, bits of stray logic which once guarded a creed, phrases which expressed the feeling that once winged a prayer. There may remain on in the arid desolation a very valley full of dry bones—of aspirations which have no goal; of opinions which have no real basis, no practical consequences; of friendships which are felt to be hollow, but which are still kept up; of habits which have lost all meaning, but which it is hard to surrender. Not seldom may we meet with writers and with talkers, with historians, with poets, whose language shows that they have once known what it is to believe, but for whom a living faith has perished utterly, and left behind it only these dried-up relics of its former life.

¶ Earlier in his life, while Carlyle was young and confident, and the effects of his religious training were fresh in him, the existence, the omnipresence, the omnipotence of God, were then the strongest of his convictions. The faith remained unshaken in him to the end; he never himself doubted; yet he was perplexed by the indifference with which the Supreme Power was allowing its existence to be obscured. I once said to him, not long before his death, that I could only believe in a God which *did* something. With a cry of pain, which I shall never forget, he said, "He does nothing." For himself, however, his faith stood firm. He did not believe in historical Christianity. He did not believe that the

[1] *Memorials of Henry Forbes Julian* (1914), 124.

facts alleged in the Apostles' Creed had ever really happened. The resurrection of Christ was to him only a symbol of a spiritual truth. As Christ rose from the dead, so were we to rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Not that Christ had actually died and had risen again. He was only *believed* to have died and *believed* to have risen in an age when legend was history, when stories were accepted as true from their beauty or their significance. The body of the belief was now perishing, and the soul of it being discredited by its connexion with discovered error, was suspected not to be a soul at all; half mankind, betrayed and deserted, were rushing off into materialism.[1]

(4) Again there is restlessness and aimlessness. If there is one thing which the awakening man feels, it is the scatteredness, the disjointedness, of his being. I am made up of countless parts —innumerable elements of thought and feeling, desire and will, affection and ambition, interest and occupation. I do not complain of a want of variety, of diversity, of manifoldness of gifts; that which I bewail is a want of *unity*. I give this fragment of myself to this, and another fragment of myself to that—I bestow here a wish, and there an effort, and there a taste, and there a liking; here an outlay of time, and there of money, and there of toil, and there of affection—one lord after another has dominion over me, many by turns, no one in perpetuity—and when I look at my life it is a thing of shreds and fragments; it has no coherence, no continuity, no plan, or, if any, only one of roving, straying, sinning. And now the grey hairs are upon me. I have eaten and drunken, I have played and toiled, almost my entire portion, and nothing is done, nothing is gained—nothing which can be called mine, nothing which can go with me when I die, or welcome me at the other side into everlasting habitations. The bones of my complex frame are dry, and lo, they lie all along the valley of my being, no two in one!

¶ If proof of the fact that the forces of materialism have been at work among us were needed, nothing could afford it more clearly than our loss of peace and dignity in modern society. Many costly luxuries have become necessities, and they have increased the pace of life to a rush and fury which makes business a turmoil and social life a fever. A symbolic embodiment

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1834–1881*, ii. 268.

of this spirit may be seen in the motor-car and the aeroplane as they are often used. These indeed need not be ministers of paganism. The glory of swift motion and the mounting up on wings as eagles reach very near to the spiritual, if not indeed across its borderland, as exhilarating and splendid stimuli to the human spirit. But, on the other hand, they may be merely instruments for gratifying that insane human restlessness which is but the craving for new sensations. Along the whole line of our commercial and industrial prosperity there runs one great division. There are some who, in the midst of all change, have preserved their old spiritual loyalties, and there are others who have substituted novelty for loyalty. These are the idealists and the pagans of the twentieth century.[1]

(5) Such was the state of the whole world when Christ came down to save it. The whole world was lying dead in trespasses and sins; and nothing was to be seen in the whole race of man but the wreck of shattered souls. If we look into the first chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we are there carried in spirit to a far more appalling and loathsome vision than that which met the eyes of the prophet Ezekiel—to a place filled, not with dry bones, but with unrighteousness, with fornication, with covetousness, with envy, with murder, with strife, with deceit, with malignity, with backbiting, with hatred of God, with despitefulness, with pride, with boasting, with undutifulness, with implacableness, with unmercifulness, with all things that die, and with all things that kill. When our eyes wander over these carcasses of souls, mouldering and rotting on every side, we can hardly so much as take heart to ask, Can these bones live?

But some members of the Church make a greater problem than men of the world. They make us ask, in more despair than the world itself stirs, Can these bones live? These people go to church, uphold their Church, and would fight for their Church; they would make civil war for its privilege. They have more fight than faith in them. Their souls are exceedingly filled with contempt. And they have a name of lusty life. But they are spiritually dead and they care for their Church but as partisans, or because it is a centre of social rank, or of juvenile amusements. What preacher but is cast into occasional despair by that question

[1] J. Kelman, *Among Famous Books*, 243.

as he looks upon many spiritual skeletons around him? What preacher has not many a time to answer with Ezekiel that these can live only by some miracle of God?

¶ The members of Mr. Murker's little congregation, disturbed and shaken with the dissension that had arisen [over the question of electing a woman as treasurer of the church], "were cast down but not destroyed," "perplexed but not in despair." A tenacious affection and unfaltering loyalty for the "cause" kept most of them together. They did not value their "principles" less because they had betrayed human infirmities in working them out. They were simple people, but they were not so illogical as to suppose that the trying vicissitudes which their church shared in common with all earthly institutions proved their particular policy to be unsound. Order is good, but life, they held, came before order. One of their members from Macduff met a member of the Established Church there who twitted him upon a want of harmony in the Congregational Chapel. "Why," he said, "do you dissenters have so many differences. Look at the folk in the Kirk, how quiet they are!" "Oh, yes," was the smart but provoked rejoinder, "the folk in the Kirk are quiet, very quiet; *so are the folk in the yaird behin' the Kirk!*"[1]

2. What we have here, then, is an allegory of resurrection. But it is the resurrection, not of the body, nor primarily of the soul as individual, but of the nation. The resurrection of the individual dead was no part as yet of the Hebrew faith. This is shown here by the prophet's answer to the question, "Can these bones live?" "O Lord God, thou knowest," he said. If the resurrection of the dead had been a current belief, or the prophet's belief, he would have said, "Yea, Lord." But he took the unlikeliest, most incredible thing they knew to illustrate the grandeur of what God would do. The people were as hopeless of the future as they were of the dead rising. The point of the vision is lost if we suppose a current belief in the resurrection of the dead, or any intention of the prophet to teach it. "God will do a thing as incredible in its way as you and I know the raising of the dead to be." It is originally, then, an allegory of spiritual resurrection; but of spiritual resurrection in national or public form.

[1] J. Stark, *John Murker of Banff*, 42.

II.

A Living Prophet.

Ezekiel was himself to be the instrument of the regeneration. Christ can do no mighty works through unbelief; unbelief ever breeds spiritual paralysis; it sinks into a slough of despond, and there wallows in its helplessness. Ezekiel was the one man who had the faith and courage to lift his eyes above the phenomena to the great Reality that is behind all phenomena, the one man who refused to fix his gaze on the dry bones as if that were the whole truth. If he saw the dead bones, he saw also the living God, and set no limits to His power. The man of faith comes to his generation with a message: he is a seer of the mountain tops, who sees the heavens open and the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of power. The prophet is a man with a mission and a message, who sees deep into the heart of things because God has anointed his eyes with eye-salve; and so he becomes an interpreter of truth to his generation. "Again he said unto me, Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." It was the thing they needed most. They had listened to the word of Nebuchadnezzar till their hearts welled within them; they marked the horses and chariots of Babylon, and cried, Woe unto us, for we are undone. But, here is a man who heard the word of the Lord, who saw the horses of fire and chariots of fire round about them, and therefore bears himself with strength and assurance. So he prophesied as he was commanded; he brought to the people a message of hope; he came to tell them the Lord was among them.

1. Ezekiel was *prepared* for his part in this resurrection from the dead. He was prepared in a twofold way.

(1) *He had a vision of God.*—In the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy we are told that he saw visions of God. He saw wings with human hands under them; a vision of the Divine and the human—(the wing everywhere symbolizes Divinity, and the hand humanity)—the Divine controlling the human, for the wings moved the hands. He saw winged creatures with the face of a man symbolizing intelligence, the face of a lion symbolizing

courage, the face of an ox symbolizing patience, and the face of an eagle symbolizing aspiration, all under control of the Divine wings. The need of every prophet of God is that his intelligence, courage, patience, and aspiration shall be linked with God and be completely controlled by Him.

(2) *He felt the hand of God.*—"The hand of the Lord was upon me." The hand of the Lord symbolizes His power, and to be under His hand is to be endued with His power. The Spirit of God is in every Christian for life, but every Christian is not under God's hand for power. The prophet responds to the touch of God and goes where He leads. "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones." He was willing to be led by the Lord's hand into the valley of bones. The temptation is for us to seek the garden with its flowers rather than the valley with its bones.

¶ The sorrowful sense of the widespread deadness must enter into a man's spirit, and be ever present to him, in order to fit him for his work. A dead world is not to be quickened on easy terms. We must see mankind in some measure as God sees them if we are to do God's work among them. So-called Christian teachers, who do not believe that the race is dead in sin, or who, believing it, do not feel the tragedy of the fact, and the power lodged in their hands to bring the true life, may prophesy to the dry bones for ever, and there will be no shaking among them.[1]

2. Ezekiel began by facing the facts. It is always a false start in religion to begin by minimizing the tragedy that has befallen human nature—to make little of the sin that has filled the world with sorrow—and so reduce the cure which Christianity brings to the level of the merely "natural." Mr. Birrell declared once that the one doctrine of religion he had never any difficulty in believing was the doctrine of original sin. Human nature is depraved—totally depraved. That does not mean that there is no good left in it; there is a difference between fallen humanity and devilhood; there is left that to which the good can appeal and which responds to the appeal of the good. But sin has invaded human nature in its totality; it has penetrated to every part and power. It has thrown its plague of darkness over the

[1] A. Maclaren.

understanding; it has warped the emotional life; it has vitiated our moral personality and inflicted unnatural disease on our physical frames; our fall is complete, our depravity total. If we are to magnify the grace of God we must follow Ezekiel's example. He did not explain away the stern and awful facts, so fostering a false hope. No, he stood in the very midst of the valley gazing on the melancholy scene; he passed by the bones round about; he surveyed all the facts, and there was no getting away from them, there were very many, and they were very dry.

¶ That this world hath evil in all its parts, that its matter is in a corrupt, disordered state, full of grossness, disease, impurity, wrath, death, and darkness, is as evident as that there is light, beauty, order, and harmony everywhere to be found in it. It is as impossible that this outward state and condition of things should be a first and immediate work of God as that there should be good and evil in God Himself. . . . But now, as in man, the little world, there is excellency and perfection enough to prove that human nature is the work of an All-perfect Being, yet so much impurity and disease of corrupt flesh and blood as undeniably shows that sin has almost quite spoiled the work of God; so, in the great world, the footsteps of an infinite wisdom in the order and harmony of the whole sufficiently appear, yet the disorders, tumults, and evils of nature plainly demonstrate that the perfect condition of this world is only the remains or ruins, first, of a heaven spoiled by the fall of angels, and then of a paradise lost by the sin of man. So that man and the world in which he lives lie both in the same state of disorder and impurity, have both the same marks of life and death in them, both bring forth the same sort of evils, both want a redeemer, and have need of the same kind of death and resurrection before they can come to their first state of purity and perfection.[1]

3. But in facing the facts Ezekiel did not acquiesce in them. The temptation of religious people everywhere is to recognize the wide extent of insensibility and to acquiesce in it. They mark where their neighbours are and, having given to each his badge, they let them be; he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is worldly let him be worldly still, for characters are formed, and there is little use in fighting against facts. There are whole communities which have sunk to that, which are perfectly respectable, but with no faintest impulse of aggression,

[1] William Law, *An Appeal to all that Doubt* (ed. 1768), 18.

and where the great powers which transfigure character are unknown.

¶ Much of what in Scotland was called Moderatism began by being something else. A minister, with evangelical sympathies, found himself in a parish where swearing and hard drinking abounded; at first he talked in his own dialect, but, in a while, as no one understood, he changed his tone, and through the rest of life he was content to discharge a purely mechanical office, taking men as they were, and not expecting them ever to be different. But alongside of that we have another record, of brave men coming into very ungodly regions, and by sheer courage and directness penetrating the hard crust of habit, and awakening in the unlikeliest people interest, and tenderness, and the deep fountain of tears.[1]

¶ Tolstoy describes the effect in a frightful lodging-house in Moscow of something which he had said without knowing that he was overheard. Over the top of a partition in the room, one woman's head and then another appeared, looking at him with strained attention. "I had not expected that a casual word would produce such an impression. It was like the field of battle seen by Ezekiel on which the bones began to move. I had uttered a chance word of love and pity, and it produced upon these women such an effect that it seemed as if they had been waiting for it, to cease to be corpses and to become alive again." Nothing is gained by underestimating the difficulty; and yet I think that every one who has had experience in working for others must have seen effects in individuals like that which Tolstoy describes, when they found themselves in some way accepted by the good, and spoken to as if, after all their waste of life, they still might make something of it. They may be far from what they ought to be, but it is an unforgettable lesson to see such movements in what seemed a hopeless life.[2]

4. Then, to our surprise, instead of Jehovah Himself addressing the bones and rousing them to unity and life by His word of thunder, He turns to the prophet, and bids *him* pronounce the magic word. "Prophesy thou over the bones." The Divine and resuscitating word is to be spoken by God's human servant. "Dry Bones"—they are thus addressed as if that were their name —"listen"—among these dead ones there are still, it would seem, slumbering possibilities—"listen to the word of Jehovah," the word, that is, that falls from the lips of His prophet. What

[1] W. M. Macgregor, *Some of God's Ministries*, 208. [2] *Ibid.*

qualifications had Ezekiel for this task? Every worker in the valley of bones needs three qualifications. He must be a man of God, a man of the Bible, and a man of prayer. He must keep right with God and the word of God, while he trusts the Spirit of God. No valley of bones can resist a man of this kind.

(1) Ezekiel was a man of God in that he was right with God and completely under God's control. It is well to be a man of learning, a man of position, a man of means, a man of eloquence, but it is a thousand times better to be a man of God.

(2) But, further, the man of God must speak the word of God. The prophet spoke to the bones exactly what God told him. In 2 Timothy iii. 16, 17, we have the purpose of the Scriptures: "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that *the man of God* may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." The man of God has the whole Bible from which to draw equipment for every good work.

¶ This is the glory of the Bible. It is at once the book of truth, the book of law, and the book of influence. Think of it as the book of truth, and you remember immediately the great historical pictures of the Old Testament, and the great appeals to reason in the Epistles of the New. Think of it as the book of law, and you hear the thunder of the Ten Commandments, and the vehement admonitions of the Hebrew prophets. Think of it as the book of influence, and you feel the pathetic power of the Psalms of David and the Gospel of St. John. Try to conceive its full might as a combination of the three, and there stands out before you the personality of Him of whom the whole Bible is but the picture and expression—that Christ who is at once the teacher of man's ignorance, the ruler of man's waywardness, and the inspirer of man's spiritual vitality; at once the Truth and the Way and the Life. It is in its combination and mastery of all three of these great fundamental powers that the Bible is the universal and eternal book, the Word of God to man.[1]

(3) He must also be a man of prayer, depending upon the Spirit of God to use the Word. The prophet was commanded to call upon the breath of God to breathe upon the valley of bones, and, while he spoke God's word, God's invisible power moved upon the valley.

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 472.

¶ "The most striking thing of all in each day's work," says one of Professor Flint's students,—"the most impressive act of all—was the prayer with which he began the day's work. There we were—130 of us or so, finding our several ways like the members of a great herd to our accustomed places, and having found them, chatting away about all sorts of things in church and state—sharpening pencils, preparing notebooks; a hum, a buzz, a rustle over all. And then the retiring-room door opened; a little, spare, alert figure hastened to the platform with exactly that shy sideways-looking expression in the Sir George Reid portrait, so sideways-looking and uncertain in his walk as to give one at times the impression of lameness. The next moment we were on our feet with heads bent, minds waiting, ears straining, listening to the few short sentences of agonised and agonising pleading with which he cast himself and us all on the mercy of God in Christ. Pardon for our sins, strength for our need, the strength needful for this day and its duties: just a few short sentences, but they seemed to rise out of infinite depths of helplessness and of trust, the cry of a strong man in his utter weakness and absolute dependence upon God. It was an instruction to us that we should prepare the devotional part of our Sunday service before we took up the preparation of our sermon; we know that this was his own custom for each day's lecture. And as we ponder his precept and recall his example and think of our foolishness in the neglect of both, we get very near the secret, the greatest of all the secrets, perhaps, of our failure on the Sabbath day. His prayer was a wrestling with God and a prevailing; the hard won victory of faith over a stubborn wilfulness and out of the midst of a great weakness."[1]

III.

The Life-Giving God.

The dry bones stirred at the word of the Lord. They were not thereby vitalized or quickened, but they were stirred. Ezekiel describes the effect in one of the weirdest of visions. "As I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together bone to his bone." Under the urgent preaching of the prophet, the *dissecta membra*—those miserable fragments of mutilated manhood—were stirred to shame at their condition, and they rallied into at least the appearance of an organized body.

[1] D. Macmillan, *The Life of Robert Flint* (1914), 288.

There was a "shaking"; a movement all over the valley as the bones, recognizing their mutual affinities, glided towards one another; and there was a "noise" as they came together with hollow click, bone to his bone. And then over the naked skeletons flesh and sinew crept, and the skin covered them above. And that was all that the preaching of the greatest prophet of his generation accomplished, all that his urgent entreaty to hear the word of the Lord effected.

There was still no breath in them. Any quickening of interest was a momentary reflection of light from his eager face, for they had no source of light within themselves. So, after prophesying to the bones, there remained for him another prophesying, to the wind—"Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." In preaching and in all great work for men, we come upon the same transition—from that which we can do to that which we cannot do, when we must lay down the instruments at our command, and seek another. All greater work requires them both.

1. Ezekiel's preaching had prepared the way of the Lord, and made His path straight; the reorganized bones in which the saving grace of shame had been stirred were ready to receive the quickening of the Divine power. And God is ready to give wherever men are ready to receive; the valley of dry bones was to be the scene of a great manifestation of creative goodness. As it was in the beginning, so it was now. In that far-off day of creation God fashioned the dust of the earth into a human form, and it lay before Him, a masterpiece of Divine architecture. But it was dead; it was unspiritual; it was like the beasts of the field, only a little more elaborately planned, a little more delicately executed. But God had graciously purposed to make man in His own image, after His likeness. And, stooping over that masterpiece of clay modelling, He breathed into it His own Divine breath; He said to it: "Receive the Holy Ghost," and now that animate clay was a living son of God. Just so, after the dead bones had come

together, after sinew and flesh and skin had covered them; after all the reformation had been effected that human preaching and moral influence could effect, God said, Prophesy now to the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Come and breathe upon these bones, that they may live. It was all they needed now, and it was a need that only the Spirit of God could supply.

In the Church that bears the name of Christ we may have everything but the essential thing. We may have order and decency and reverence and the appearance of fraternity. Bone may come to bone, and there may be the sinews and even the flesh and skin, and yet there may be no pervading breath, no mysterious and unifying life. We may have a congregation, but not a communion; we may have an assembly, but not an army; we may have a fellowship roll, but not of those who are counted alive, and whose names "are written in the Lamb's book of life." We may be just a crowd, and not "the family of the living God." We may have prayers, but no prayer. We may have petitions, but no real intercession. We may have posture and homage, but no supplication. We may have exquisite ritual, but no holy worship. We may have what men call "a finished service," and yet there may be nothing of the violence of a vital faith. We may have benevolences, but no sacrifice. We may have the appearance of service, but no shedding of blood. The Church may be only an organized corpse. But when the breath comes, how then? The breath of God converts an organization into an organism; it transforms a combination into a fellowship, a congregation into a church, a mob into an army. That breath came into a little disciple-band weakened by timidity and fear, and it changed it into a spiritual army that could not be checked or hindered by "the world, the flesh and the devil." And when the same breath of God comes into a man of "parts," a man of many faculties and talents, sharpened by culture, drilled and organized by discipline, it endows him with the veritable power of an army, and makes him irresistible. "And Peter, filled with the holy breath!" How can we compute the value and the significance and the power of that unifying association? Peter himself becomes an army, "an army of the living God." If the Church were filled with men of such glorious spiritual endowment, what

would be the tale of exploits, what new chapters would be added to the Acts of the Apostles!

¶ I suppose there never was a time in the history of the world when organization went for so much, for good or ill, as it does to-day. Societies have been called into existence for all manner of purposes, till they oust the home and threaten to submerge even the Church. Science is organized both into philosophies and into great industries. Philanthropy is organized as a serious business. The Churches themselves organize and federate in a way unheard of; and some seek to organize now that never were organized before. Missions are conducted by societies which are in themselves small states. Politics and parties are in the hands of wire-pullers. And death is organized as well as life. Drink is organized into a solid, selfish interest, anti-social, anti-national, and anti-human. Armies were never such perfect and costly machines, and wars were never so scientific. The bloodless war of industry is entering on a phase of trusts and syndicates, when vast organizations threaten to extinguish private enterprise altogether. The commercial swallows up the national. The fieriest patriotism vanishes when we can sell on excellent terms to a rival race. It is the newest Catholicism, the latest Ultramontanism—that of finance. Labour also is organized, no less than Capital, in a way that seems at times to threaten both the life and the conscience of industry. Civilization altogether becomes organized, by wire, and rail, and press, into a concert which is not always in tune, but is still in action. But is there no danger in this passionate rush to the mechanical side of existence? As we perfect the form, what is to become of the spirit? Can we organize human nature, and land this leviathan with a hook? Can we organize ourselves into eternal life, or thus contest with Christ the monopoly of souls? Do we not already know more than we have power to manage?[1]

2. Jehovah, who breathed into the nostrils of the first man the breath of life, is able and ready to work His ancient wonder upon less promising subjects and on a more splendid scale. Breath is the greatest thing, the necessary thing, to a living man —mentioned here first, and as God's own gift; till they get their breath, they will be of no use. But it is imparted last. First, the dry and wizened bones must be clothed with flesh and sinews, and then, when they look like human beings, they will be ready for breath. And finally, when they stand upon their feet, an

[1] P. T. Forsyth, *Missions in State and Church*, 326.

exceeding great army, the breath of life in their nostrils, and the light of life in their eyes, then they will know "that I am Jehovah." For those hopeless men of whom the sapless bones are the emblem do not yet rightly know what manner of God is theirs, and how by His mighty power He can revive them again.

¶ What precise meaning we ought to attach to expressions such as that of the prophecy to the four winds that the dry bones might be breathed upon, and might live, or why the presence of the vital power should be dependent on the chemical action of the air, and its awful passing away materially signified by the rendering up of that breath or ghost, we cannot at present know, and need not at any time dispute. What we assuredly know is that the states of life and death are different, and the first more desirable than the other, and by effort attainable, whether we understand being "born of the spirit" to signify having the breath of heaven in our flesh, or its power in our hearts.[1]

"Can these bones live?"—
"God knows:
The prophet saw such clothed with flesh and skin;
A wind blew on them, and life entered in;
They shook and rose.
Hasten the time, O Lord, blot out their sin,
Let life begin."[2]

3. Observe then, the first lesson of the vision. That lesson is commonly misread, even by us, or at least read with the wrong emphasis. The object of this vision is not to produce the sense of our own spiritual helplessness. No doubt its picture of the dead—unburied, dismembered, so long dead that only bones are left; these bones so long exposed as to be bleached and dry—is appallingly vivid. But that is not the point of the Lord's answer in the vision. The real point is a challenge to God's power. The people were saying, "Our bones are dried, our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts." Well, said the Lord, I take you at your own terms. You talk about "dry bones." I will give My servant the prophet a vision of a whole valley covered over with dry bones; and, in face of that vision, say,

[1] Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 55 (*Works*, xix. 354).
[2] Christina G. Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, 204.

"Can these bones live?" The power of God, not the helplessness of man, is the real meaning of the vision. For the prophet is so sure that the thought of such bones being brought again to life could never have come but from Him who quickeneth the dead, that he instantly replies, "O Lord, thou knowest."

4. And the second lesson is that the power of God is exercised through human means. "It is my power," says the Lord; "but it is to be applied in the exercise of your ministry." So Ezekiel is bidden prophesy "upon" or "over" these bones. He is bidden address the word even to these bleached and scattered relics: "Say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

The turning-point of the prophet's ministry was when he bore a message declaring that the Lord would do the very thing which men themselves said was impossible. For that prophecy had a quickening power in it which brought about its own fulfilment. And so has it always proved. When God's servants tell men plainly of their "death in sin," of their utter want of power in themselves to serve the living God, and yet proclaim that God has sent His message for this very purpose, that they shall live, it brings its own fulfilment. Often men think otherwise. They call it a discouraging doctrine! They say, "What use is there in preaching the helplessness of man?" But that is not the kernel of our message; it is the helpfulness and the power of God. God sends His message for this very purpose—to rouse men, to draw together these bones to one another, to call to them "Arise from the dead!" for Christ shall give them light. It is *then* and *thus* that awakenings, conversions, revivals have invariably followed.

¶ When Tennyson passed from school to the university, religious life in England had very much decayed. The spirit which animated Wesley, and which had fallen like the prophet's mantle on the earlier Evangelicals, had now become cold. English religion, in and out of the Church, was like the valley Ezekiel described, full of bones, and the bones were dry. And in the midst of the valley one figure, now old, who had seen the fire of religious sacrifice rise high to God in the past, who had welcomed its descent and directed it into new channels but who had outlived his enthusiasm, went to and fro, chilled at heart, and wailing for what had been. It was the soul of Coleridge,

and if the voice of the Spirit asked him, "Son of man, can these bones live?" he answered, but not in hope, "O Lord God, thou knowest." He died before he saw the resurrection which Tennyson saw, the blowing of the wind of God, and the bones coming together, and the slain breathed upon, so that they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.[1]

[1] Stopford A. Brooke, *Tennyson*, 18.

Open Windows.

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Open Windows.

And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.—Dan. vi. 10.

Windows as we use them to-day serve a double purpose. They not only admit the air, they also provide a view. We value them for vision as much as for ventilation. They feed our eyes as well as our lungs. Whether it be landscape or street, wooded valley, winding river and tree-crested hill, or thronged pavement, bustling crowd and jostling traffic, we crave to see out of our windows. If the wood shuts out our view, some trees must fall: if the room looks on blank walls, its rent is less. The modern man values his window for the world it opens to him without, not simply for the light it furnishes him within. And so when we can we choose the house with a view, the room with a view. When we re-model the old building, we plan cunningly to secure a vista. Walls are pierced and towers are reared and wings are built for the sake of the prospect. Happy the man who can afford it, secure it, and enjoy it. Many eyes go hungry for beauty most days of their life save for the sight of God's changing sky.

In the architecture of the spirit there are fewer disabilities. I cannot choose the site on which my life has to be lived, nor can I decide the shape of the dwelling of the soul, but I can break through the wall and throw out a window where I choose. First, I must see to it that there are casements through which knowledge and love pour in plentifully. But this is not enough. I miss my birthright unless some opening be found or formed, though only a loophole, through which I can gaze on a chosen scene and descry the prospect I prefer. Without the window of vision, life lacks the splendour of spaciousness. We are invited to see not only the King in His beauty but also the far-stretching

land. Though the house of my soul be but a hut, yet I can escape from littleness, if the land of far distances is open to my gaze. Though my lot be cast in a palace, if I have never learnt to throw back the shutters and to seek the horizon, I live a prisoned life.

Daniel's open windows give us a revelation of—

I. The Courage of the Open Window.
II. The Piety of the Open Window.
III. The Imagination of the Open Window.

I.

The Courage of the Open Window.

1. The story of Daniel reads like a romance. He had been brought as a captive from Jerusalem at the age of twelve. On account of his comeliness and intellectual promise he had been selected, with other captive youths of noble lineage, to receive an education in Babylonian lore. He was assigned to the royal bounty at the king's table. A difficulty here confronted him. The meat that was spread upon the table had previously been offered on the altars of pagan gods. It is written, "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat." The alternative, which he chose, was a simple diet of pulse and water. He was the stuff that heroes are made of.

Time passed. Step by step he rose to successive positions of honour and responsibility until, the Medo-Persian Empire being divided into one hundred and twenty satrapies, he was made one of a triumvirate to rule over them. But his success and faithfulness had provoked the hostility of his pagan *confrères*; envy ever "hates the excellence it cannot reach." In matters of public trust they could find no occasion against him; he was vulnerable only at one point—his religion. He was a Jew, a nonconformist. For many years he had been loyal to his ancestral faith. And just there the trap was laid for him. No doubt there were other Jews in Babylon. Daniel was a Jew who had reached a high place and influence. It was with Daniel as with Merlin in "The Idylls of the King":—

Sweet were the days when I was all unknown,
But when my name was lifted up, the storm
Brake on the mountain and I cared not for it.
Right well know I that Fame is half-disfame,
Yet needs must work my work.

The conspirators knew the weakness of their king. They said to him, "King Darius, live for ever." We "have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions." It was, in fact, a proposition to deify the king. He was overcome by their flattery. The proclamation was drawn up, and the royal seal was affixed, making it "a law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."

¶ The weak King blundered into the snare so dexterously spread at his feet. Not the faintest suspicion crossed his mind of the insidious design which underlay this piece of flattery. It pleased him to imagine that for a whole month, in all the provinces of his kingdom, men would be praying to him as to a god. And the proposal did not strike him as being in any way ridiculous. Among the Medes and Persians, the divinity that "doth hedge a king" was something more than a figure of speech. The monarch was regarded in some sort as an incarnation of Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Deity. His decrees were infallible, and could not be repealed. He dwelt in the privacy of his palace, secluded from the eyes of the profane crowd; fenced round by an etiquette fantastic in its stringency. The sculptures of Persepolis show the monarch wearing a peculiar kind of shoe, so as to elevate him above the stature of common men. The Persian kings, like the Emperors of Rome, were formally deified after death; their tombs became a kind of temple, where sacrifice was regularly offered. Thus Darius saw nothing absurd in his courtiers' proposal, and readily gave his assent.[1]

2. Now it is evident that the Jews at Babylon might have conformed to this edict without any apparent sacrifice of principle. It did not touch the central doctrine of their faith; they were not commanded by it to worship any other God, they were not required by it to pay any Divine honour to the king. It was a negative, not a positive, decree. No royal mandate could touch

[1] P. Hay Hunter, *The Story of Daniel*, 295.

their private devotions or check the free aspiration of their souls after God. The pious Jew might still hold converse with Jehovah; no law of Mede or Persian could render impossible that devout resolve of the Psalmist: "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Persecution was not attempted; open apostasy was not required. Indeed, we can conceive that a spiritually-minded Jew might even have thanked God for the decree as not practically affecting his own religion, and yet, by a month's suspension of idolatrous rites, striking a heavy blow at the false faith of his conquerors. Why, we may ask, should Daniel have fallen into a trap it was so easy to avoid? He need not drop one petition out of his daily prayers. He need not by word or gesture pay blasphemous honour to the new sovereign. Why should he obtrude his disobedience? Why should he expose himself to the skulking enemies who laid their treacherous ambush, and were bent upon his ruin? Was he courting martyrdom in its most awful form, as we know that some early Christians courted it with such enthusiastic self-devotion that at last the Church was compelled to anathematize the needless sacrifice of her sons? Was he reckless of the life so precious to his countrymen, who looked to him as their chief bulwark and champion, and whose hopes must have been bound up with the perpetuation of his influence?

There is something unspeakably sublime in the line taken by that Hebrew courtier. No fanatic was he, no headlong zealot, but the wisest and most diplomatic of statesmen and the farthest-sighted of men. Calmly and deliberately, with no false pride and no miscalculation of the danger, but perfectly aware of the risk, and counting all the cost to himself and to others, he "went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

¶ What was it Luther meant when in the face of pope and council he insisted that the human intelligence must be freed? "Unless I be convicted of error by the Scriptures or by powerful reasons, neither can nor will I dare to retract anything. Here

stand I. I can do no otherwise. God help me." Oh the power and revelation of that word, Dare! It was the serious utterance of a brave, religious, human soul. So it has appealed to all human souls always. But it was the utterance of a soul conscious of God and of its own mysterious self. "I *dare* not retract," it said. It was no outburst of wilfulness. The two compulsions, the compulsion to tell God's truth to men, and the compulsion to come near to God Himself, held him so fast that he could not escape. There was no wilfulness. It was not that he would not be the slave of authority. He did not *dare* to be. It was not so much that he refused the obedience of men as that he gave himself heart and soul to the obedience of God.[1]

II.

The Piety of the Open Window.

1. Daniel kneeled and prayed. He had arrived at an age when rash enthusiasm does not as a rule commend itself. And it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have refrained from making any open parade of his devotions. Who was to know, if he did not choose to tell, how Daniel passed his hours of seclusion? He was not a poor young captive now, but a great noble whose bidding multitudes obeyed, second only to the king himself; none dare intrude on his privacy. And it would not only have been the part of prudence to keep his religious observances to himself; he may well have felt that it would be for the interests of his adopted country that he and no other should steer the ship of State through the troubled waters of foreign policy. Men's prayers can be said in private as well as in public; and God would hear him no less in his secret chamber than if he were in the Temple at Jerusalem. If ever a man had good excuse for not making any open and public profession of unpopular beliefs, that man was Daniel. But yet he disobeyed the order of the king, and that with defiance. "When he knew that the writing was signed"—there was no delay until he might first gain the ear of the king and entreat his clemency—"when he knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem;) and

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 381.

he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

¶ The story of Daniel's trial is a parable of what happens every day, with young as with old. Things seem to be going well with us. Our lot is cast in a fair ground. We have a goodly heritage. Our religious life is easy, and requires no sacrifice, as it seems, either of comfort or fame or power. And then we suddenly discover that it would be for our advantage to conform more closely to the laws, social, moral, or religious, which the society around us prescribes. And self-interest urges that it is but a small matter, after all, that is at stake, and that it is not seemly to put ourselves in opposition to the opinions of the majority. Who are we that we should lay down rules for the conduct of life? Power and fame, these may be used for great and worthy ends; is it not the foolish part to sacrifice them for some fantastic scruple which even our best friends cannot understand? And so in our miserable self-deceit we silence the voice of conscience, and go on our way with one more link broken between ourselves and God. And if it be true quite generally—as indeed it is, and without qualification—that if we disobey any slightest hint of conscience, no matter whether other people understand it or not, we do so at our peril, it is even more plainly and emphatically true that we dare not tamper with conscience in the special matter of prayer. It was in this particular that Daniel felt, and rightly felt, that he dare make no change in his daily habits. Prayer is so intimately associated with all that is best and strongest in the religious life that anything which tends to lessen the sense of its importance or its solemnity is injurious to the health of the soul. Prayer: it is the very heart and centre of religion; and therefore it is that the habit of persistence in prayer under difficulty is one of the most important habits which we can acquire.[1]

¶ "O prayer," cried the impassioned preacher [Whitefield] in another part of his sermon at the second Calvinistic Methodist Conference, "O prayer, prayer! it brings and keeps God and man together; it raises man up to God, and brings God down to man. If you would keep up your walk with God, pray, pray without ceasing. Be much in set prayer. When you are about the common business of life, be much in secret ejaculatory prayer. Send, from time to time, short letters post to heaven, upon the wings of faith. They will reach the very heart of God, and will return to you loaded with blessings."[2]

[1] J. H. Bernard, *Via Domini*, 265.

[2] L. Tyerman, *The Life of George Whitefield*, ii. 56.

2. Daniel prayed three times a day. Doubtless the points of time when he performed these acts of devotion were morning, noon, and night. The Jewish sacrifices morning and evening would suggest two of those times for prayer, if nature itself did not, — if suggestion were necessary. But, as Martineau has beautifully said, "All nations and all faiths of cultivated men have chosen the twilight hour, morning and evening, for their devotion," "with an instinctive feeling" that the Being of God "is the meeting-place of light and shade, and that in approaching Him we must stand on the confines between the seen and the unseen." Although the midday prayer was not so general, yet pious souls at noontide refreshed themselves with an act of Divine communion. Daniel observed these times of prayer "as he did aforetime." He had formed the habit. Regularity as to times of prayer is necessary if devotion is to be sustained. It is not the irregular and impulsive act, but the restraint of impulse, or at least its guidance, that forms habit.

Daniel prayed three times a day, and, more than that, he had a particular place for praying, and a particular window at which he prayed and a specific point on the western horizon towards which his devotions were directed. All of this was quite mechanical and formal; and yet we remember that Daniel was an exceedingly safe man in an emergency. The movements in the astronomic heavens are all of them along lines of mathematical precision, which at the first look may appear to rob the firmament and the dances of the stars of something of their poetry and song; and yet the fact, cold and unmelodious though it may be, enables us to compute the right ascension and declination of those stars for any given moment of the day, year, or century, which is something. Daniel was perhaps more methodical than poetic; but it is something to be able to forecast a man's latitude and longitude. The clock-work element in Daniel's religion was quite conspicuous, and yet it is worth a good deal to have a man in trying times that will tick the minutes as distinctly as he, and strike with so full a ring when the hour comes round. It is good to have men who run so close with the sun that when it is foggy you can tell what time it is by looking in their faces.

¶ The devout, diligent practice of regular and unhurried Secret Prayer is needed if only to protect and develop the freedom

and the truth of habitual secret communion with God. And the momentary acts, anywhere and everywhere, of inmost heart intercourse with the ever present Lord are needed if only to keep burning the soul's altar-fire, that it may glow both more promptly and more brightly when we shut ourselves in with Him at the stated hour.[1]

¶ It seems needless to say we must have fixed times for prayer; that is obvious, but the difficulty lies in a thorough appreciation of the need for a fixed rule as to its practice and its diligent observance. The whole question of prayer is one of grace, and not unfrequently grace is most specially given where there is the most punctual obedience. Unless we adhere faithfully to our appointed hours of prayer, we are apt to be seeking self rather than God, and there is no slight danger that our time will be lost; indeed, were there no other benefit in a habit of punctuality, that of constantly giving up self-will would be great. It may be that when the appointed hour for prayer arrives, we are not inclined to pray, or chance circumstances would lead us to postpone the duty, and unless we persevere, we will soon acquire a habit of following our own inclinations, and our prayers will be regulated by mere taste or impulse; we will fall into the error of mistaking feeling for grace; our devotions will probably be curtailed, for when the right time has been let slip it is not easily replaced, and if we feel at liberty to choose our own times of prayer, we will no doubt also feel free to shorten our devotions. It is but a step further, if we have no definite rule, to give up all regular prayer. Without the help of grace weariness inevitably creeps in, and if we have no imperative rule to obey, we will surely be tempted to throw aside an irksome duty.[2]

3. The praying-place of Daniel's chamber was in a different quarter from that of all the rest of the world. All the rest of the world looked eastward; he looked westward. The west was to them the region of death and darkness, while the east was the region of life and light. But to Daniel the west was the region of hope and new life. Salvation was to come not from the sunrise, but from the sunset, from the dark national calamities that were to endure for a night, while joy was to come in the morning when the discipline of the darkness had purified and prepared his people for the light.

¶ Sun-worship was an abomination to the Jews; and here-

[1] H. C. G. Moule, *Secret Prayer*, 13. [2] *Self-Renunciation*, 2.

fore the arrangements both in the Tabernacle and Temple were such as to cause the worshippers to face not towards the east, but towards the west, in the functions of religion. Such also was the practice of the Jews in the synagogue when the Temple disappeared after the destruction of Jerusalem; and by setting their faces in an opposite direction to that of the heathen worshippers of the sun, they attested their abhorrence of that worship. And hence the significance of the vision of Ezekiel, in which he saw, with horror-stricken eyes, a number of worshippers standing at the door of the temple of God, between the porch and the altar, with their faces towards the east, worshipping the rising sun in that quarter. This attitude implied that they had turned their back upon the Temple, and all the holy worship that was carried on in it; that they had forsaken the living and true God, and gone back to the idolatries of the heathen.[1]

4. The captive Jew of old in Babylon looked to the hills of Palestine. His desire was to them; his hope was from them. All the help that he expected to get in the world was to be derived from them. But the hills to which we are commanded and encouraged to look are higher than any earthly hills, and nearer too. We have to seek help from the highest source; and the highest source is not farthest off and most inaccessible, but nearest at hand and most easily got at. It is not hills on the remote horizon that are to give us help in our necessity, but hills that are around us, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, closer, more impregnable, far richer in resources. Our help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. And let us remember that while His Divine presence fills immensity, His Saviour presence is peculiarly with His own.

¶ Some of my children have learnt to feel the Presence of God, walking from here to there again and again. We move about in God. He is around us and within us. We are like tiny sponges immersed in the Ocean of God.

To gain the sense of this Presence is His gift, to be prayed for, and sought by continually doing little acts to please Him, so that almost unconscious prayer may grow more and more.

Set yourself specially to cultivate the sense of the Presence of God, *i.e.*, that you are walking about, acting, thinking, in God. For He is nearer to us than the air which we breathe. The air

[1] H. Macmillan, *Gleanings in Holy Fields*, 68.

enters into our bodies and is cast forth again; God enters our souls to abide there.[1]

III.

The Imagination of the Open Window.

"His windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem." Across far leagues, beyond palace and plain and desert, lay that city of the uplands. He would never see it again. The last living link with it had been snapped long ago. He had risen to a pinnacle of power in his adopted country. Vast affairs absorbed his attention. Yet his chosen chamber looked towards the west, and in the hours which he could call his own, when his inmost life was disclosed, he pushed back the lattices and looked towards Jerusalem as he knelt to pray. That unshuttered casement was the symbol of his spirit. Beyond the pomp and pageantry of the Persian capital, he ever turned to the city of his memories and his hopes. His was a soul with a view.

1. None but a great poet could declare what the open window towards Jerusalem meant to Daniel. It was the city of his birth and of his God, the capital of his nation and the loadstone of his hopes. Prosperous and exalted, he was still the exile; it was the city of his love and of his dreams. But it is worth while to point out that it was neither superstition nor sentimentalism that drew his gaze towards the hill city in its ruin. It was not superstition. Muhammad, when he was feeling his way towards ceremonial details of the new faith, taught his followers for a while to turn towards Jerusalem when they prayed. The Jews failing to join him, he altered the direction towards Mecca. In either case, the impulse was superstition and the result an act of ritual. Had Daniel supposed that Jehovah's influence was supreme only at Jerusalem, his faith could never have triumphed in a city of towering ziggurats from whose lofty summits looked down victorious gods. If ever he was tempted to brood upon the shattered towers and ruined homes of the city of his birth, his faith conquered. He came to that Chamber of Vision to pray, and his habitual

[1] *Spiritual Letters of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 296.

prayer was thanksgiving. He "gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Sentimentalism is impossible to him who lives as "seeing him who is invisible." No, that outlook towards Jerusalem meant for him the tenderness which memory awakes, impulse to present duty, the confirmation of a dauntless hope. It meant an escape from the hardness and materialism and idolatry that hemmed in his life. It meant an easier approach to God and a surer starting-point for faith. The soul with a view is a soul with a way of escape and a path of ascent and a fountain of courage.

¶ Just as the Scottish emigrant in Canada dreams of the mountains and moors where he was born, and sees the glen again, and the burn swollen with the rain, and the dripping bracken, and the glory of purple heather; so Daniel in exile, heartsick if not homesick, craved for the land and the Temple that he loved. He could not see them; they were beyond his vision. It would bring them no nearer to fling wide the lattice. Yet an instinct that every one of us can understand moved him to open the window towards Jerusalem.[1]

¶ Not every one is born where nature or history have enriched the soil, but there is an answering echo in most men's breasts to these words of R. L. Stevenson:—

Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and the rain are flying,
  Blows the wind on the moors to-day and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
  My heart remembers how.[2]

¶ An old lady, just returning from a visit to New Haven, said that there she sought the old homestead, to find not a vestige left except a venerable elm that had stood before her father's door. "I would have kissed it," she said, "but for the passers-by. As it was, I stood and affectionately stroked the bark of the old tree." It may be that Daniel too had often looked away through these open windows, in fond remembrance of the scenes of his former life.[3]

2. But Jerusalem was to Daniel more than the city of his fathers and of his birth. It was the city of his faith. It symbolized for him not indeed religion but the religious com-

[1] G. H. Morrison, *Sun-Rise*, 212.
[2] R. C. Gillie, *The Soul with a View*, 13.
[3] D. J. Burrell, *The Wondrous Cross*, 118.

munity. There were Jews in the alien city where he ruled in magnificence; there were no doubt informal gatherings which were the rudimentary beginnings of the synagogue, but Jerusalem with its Temple and its sacrifices was representative of the whole race in its religious aspect. The narrator means such thoughts to pass through our mind when we read of the lattices thrust back at the hour of prayer. This man cared not simply for his own soul or for his fellow-exiles but for his whole race, and the tie which bound together his nation was religious even more than racial. Jerusalem, then, was to Daniel what the Church is to us to-day—the focal point of the Divine influence upon earth. That influence is in humanity everywhere but it flows most freely and most fully in the fellowship of believing people we call the Church. We find Christ there in a perfectly definite sense. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," said He who is the Light that lighteth every man. Togetherness accentuates His presentness. The faith and the faithfulness of Christ's people make them in their fellowship the natural and chosen dwelling-place of the Spirit of God, who once deigned to glorify the Temple of Jerusalem with His over-shadowing might. The Church of Christ is our Jerusalem.

¶ How blessed, how untiring, the joy of this great companionship [of the Christian Church]. Those who once had known all the loneliness of aliens, the misery of strangers and exiles, without any holy commonwealth, without any hope, are now no more strangers, and foreigners, but are "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God; are built into a holy temple, fitly framed together," laid upon the strong foundations of the Apostles and the prophets. They have a city in heaven, which is their dear motherland; "Jerusalem on high, which is the mother of us all." There their citizenship lies; and on earth they walk in all the virtues of the holy citizenship, in the habits of delightful intercourse, in the beauty of fellowship; "with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

It was no dead metaphor—no vague allegory—to those who heard the Lord and the Apostles tell of a family of God—of a household of Christ—of a country, a kingdom, a holy nation—of a temple fitly framed—of a body compacted and entire. Yet what meaning, what reality can our broken Christianity give to words like these?

And are we content that they should have no meaning? Are we content to shut ourselves up in the narrow question, "Am I saved?" Shall we fasten our eyes on nothing but our own private interest in Christ—our own personal receipt for getting to Heaven, as if that were something that concerned no one but ourselves?[1]

3. Moreover, Jerusalem was to Daniel the ideal city, the city of daring hope. Piercing the shadowy future, he saw that its destiny was high, its career by no means ended; it was no mere melancholy survival of shattered hopes. From Jerusalem up to God and from God down to Jerusalem—these two paths the eyes of the prophet followed daily. God and Jerusalem he saw together, and each helped him to see the other.

¶ To different eyes the vision will take diverse forms. Blake speaks of "a spiritual, fourfold London" of which he dreamed. He was not much concerned with the material aspect of the city. He knew that this would be admirable if the dwellings of the Spirit were well formed and nobly conceived and conscientiously built together. Here is his description of the real, essential London, of which streets and squares are but the material casing, revealing or obscuring it. "Lo, the stones are pity, and the bricks well wrought affections, enamelled with love and kindness; the tiles engraven gold, labour of merciful hands; the beams and rafters are forgiveness, the mortar and cement of the work tears of honesty; the nails and the screws and iron braces are well wrought blandishments, and well contrived words; firm fixing, never forgotten, always comforting the remembrance; the floors humility; the ceilings devotion; the hearths thanksgiving." Blake's words buried for a century in obscurity have become a watchword to-day—

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant Land.[2]

[1] H. Scott Holland.

[2] R. C. Gillie, *The Soul with a View*, 22.

A Promised Inheritance.

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A Promised Inheritance.

But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days.—Dan. xii. 13.

1. Daniel was one of the favoured ones under the Old Testament dispensation. Like Enoch, who walked with God and was not found, for God took him; like Elijah, who went up in the chariot of fire to heaven; like Moses, whom God buried, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day; like Job, who found the latter end of the Lord to be mercy—so Daniel was one of those few who had their special reward assigned them at the end of life.

Of other saints we read chiefly of the great things God did for them in their lives. Our eyes are fixed on their lives, and on what they did, on what they went through, on what they were saved from. Abraham and Samuel and David and the other prophets we think of as in the midst of trial, or in the thick of life; we do not turn our thoughts much towards their end or to what accompanied it. But of Daniel there is nothing that we read about in his life so striking as that which belonged to its close. He had, no doubt, a most remarkable life. He, as much as any, had gone through strange changes; he had been a proof of the strength of faith and of the power of God to protect and reward it. To him had been shown, in awful mixture of clearness and mystery, the things that were to be on the earth after him. He was most remarkable as a witness to the truth—remarkable as a prophet, remarkable as a living saint of God. But all these things he shares, more or less, with others. The thing which he has alone, the thing which will always come upon the readers of his awful book with the most solemn force, is the promise made to him individually with which it ends—the clear promise of rest beyond the grave. Daniel was one to whom it was given without any uncertainty to know what was to become of him when this world was over. He is marked out among his fellow-servants in the

company of the prophets by the privilege of his death. The light of the other world shines on him while he is yet in this. He knows, before he goes, while death is yet at a distance, that he is to "stand in his lot at the end of the days." He is one to whom death seems scarcely death, so surely does he still live beyond it.

¶ The following letter to Lydia Maria Child was written upon Mr. Whittier's return from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in Portland, in June 1879:—

"Returning from our Yearly Meeting, I was glad to welcome once more thy handwriting. I did not see thee at our dear Garrison's funeral. Was thee there? It was a most impressive occasion. Phillips outdid himself, and Theodore Weld, under the stress of powerful emotion, renewed that marvellous eloquence which, in the early days of anti-slavery, shamed the church and silenced the mob. I never heard anything more beautiful and more moving. Garrison's faith in the continuity of life was very positive. He trusted more to the phenomena of spiritualism than I can, however. My faith is not helped by them, and yet I wish I could see truth in them. I do believe, apart from all outward signs, in the future life, and that the happiness of that life, as of this, will consist in labour and self-sacrifice. In this sense, as thee say, 'there is no death.'"[1]

2. Daniel was a man greatly beloved, and many secrets were revealed to him. He had seen many visions of coming events in the history of the Church and of the world; but the time came when he was to receive no further communications, and he was told to shut up the words and seal the Book, even to the time of the end. He had received much general information regarding the coming ages. He was told that there would be days of trouble, such as never were since there was a nation; he was told of a time when sleepers in the dust should awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt; he was told that at that time they who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But when he did not understand what was said as to the time of these great events, and asked for further information, saying, "O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?" the answer he received was this, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the

[1] *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ii. 649.

end." He was to get no more light at that time regarding the great events of the future. He had to be satisfied with the thought that, if the wicked should still do wickedly, many should be purified and made white; and that those should be blessed who should wait and come to the predicted period of glory. And as for the prophet himself, if he should end his days long ere the ages have run their course, and the blessed era has arrived, he is assured that all will be well with him, and that, amid the bright glory of the future, he will not be overlooked or forgotten by the Master whom he loved so well and served so devotedly. He was relieved of his work, and dismissed from service, in these cheering words, "But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days."

¶ Daniel reminds us of John. The one was the "man greatly beloved," the other "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The one had frequent revelations and visions, especially of the times and seasons, so had the other. The one fainted and was without strength at the sight of Messiah's glory; the other fell at Christ's feet as one dead. Both were comforted by the hand of Jesus laid upon them. Both were exiles in a Gentile land. Both were very aged men. We are reminded of the last words of our Lord to John, "Follow me." To Daniel it is, Go thy way till the end.[1]

The text brings to the prophet a comforting message of—

I. Release.
II. Rest.
III. Recompense.

I.

Release.

"Go thou thy way."

These words are frequently supposed to refer to Daniel's dismissal from life. "Depart," they are supposed to mean, "thy work is over, thy time is done; take thy journey across the dim borderland that separates between seen and unseen, temporal and eternal; go thy way, and may the valley be bright, the passage

[1] Horatius Bonar.

be easy, the entrance be full." One might draw various good lessons from this reading. But it labours under a fatal objection. It implies that the end is immediate, just overshadowing, just impending; whereas the end is future. "Go thou thy way," says the speaker, "till the end be." The way, then, that Daniel must go is the way of life, not the way of death, life with its business, life with its duties, life with its work. Death and the things that follow death—these come afterwards.

1. The words, then, while they imply release from the prophetic office, are a direct encouragement to persevere with the common duties of life. Daniel's had been a wonderful career. From being cup-bearer to the Babylonian king, he had mounted to be liberator of God's people and recipient of God's revelations. But in both aspects now his work was complete. There were no more people to be liberated. There were no more revelations to be received. There were just two things which Daniel in all probability desired. One was to return with the people to Jerusalem, to see their good, and rejoice with them in their great joy. It could not well have been otherwise. Daniel at the return to Canaan, like Moses at the entrance, must have longed and prayed to go over and see the good land beyond Jordan. "No," is the answer of God, "I have another place for thee, I have another task for thee. As cup-bearer in Babylon thou didst begin, and notwithstanding all that has happened in the interval, as cup-bearer, or at any rate as State official, thou shalt end. Back then to the king's service! Back to the king's business! Arrange in his household. Advise in his court. Return to thy post then, and where life occupies thee, there let death find thee, waiting, working, ready. Go thy way till the end be."

Like St. Paul, Daniel had been in the third heaven in the presence of God. He had been carried forward into the marvellous events of the latter day. He needed a *calming* word. And here it is, "Go thy way till the end be." Do thy ordinary work; walk in the simple way of common life. In the midst of this age's convulsions, and storms, and heat; in the prospect of what is coming on the earth in the last days, we need calming words too. Let us listen to the calm, holy voice that ever speaks to us from heaven, "Be still and know that I am God;" "Let not your hearts be

troubled;" "Keep your selves in the love of God;" "What is that to thee? Follow me."

¶ "This do in remembrance of me" has turned many meals into the Lord's meals. How indeed shall we find Christ, how live by Him, if we search only the heights of heaven and know Him not as He meets us every day? It is beautiful to note how, after the resurrection, He revealed Himself in unsuspected, because too common, ways. Mary turns from the sepulchre, where she sought the Lord, to meet Him whom she thought to be only the gardener; the disciples knew Him, not as He told them of deep mysteries, but as He broke the bread for the wayfarers' evening meal. Our everyday activities, our common meals must be brought into conscious relation with Christ, we must see the absolute necessity of being in touch with the Divine source of life, if we are to understand either ourselves or Him.[1]

2. But there was another thing which Daniel wished, and it was this. Not only had he parted with his kinsmen, and seen them return without him; he had received an announcement in figure of their future history. It was not all clear, this announcement, very far from it. It was mysterious, it was vague. One thing alone was clear, one thing alone was certain. The future was to be a time of trial, a time of distress. Daniel wished to know the meaning. He wished to know the termination. He was curious, anxious, perplexed. "No," is the answer of Jehovah again, "follow your own path. And follow it not only independent of your people's company, but independent of your people's future. Leave problems alone. Put difficulties to the side. It is not for you to know the times and the seasons. The secret things belong to the Lord, the revealed things to you—for you to accept, and for you to practise. And the main revealed thing is this—your duty to your king's interests, your engagement in the king's service, till the call comes to stop. Will you have this question answered? Will you have that riddle solved? Desist from them all. Be satisfied with the fact that your own weal is cared for. Be satisfied with the fact that your own safety is ensured. 'Go thou thy way till the end be.' All will be well when that comes. 'Thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days.'"

[1] Joan Mary Fry, *The Way of Peace*.

In the life and experience of most of us there is much that is perplexing and strange, and not a little that appears to be unjust; and we are often impatient to learn the secrets of Divine providence and the wherefore of God's working as He does; hearts become angry or fretful, sometimes faith fails, and the soul is in a state of insurrection. But it must be remembered that the present is for us a waiting time. God, when the hour of His appointment has fully come, will make clear His hidden purposes, will resolve the doubts that trouble us, and fully answer all the hard questions of life; so that we eventually shall see that, however strange the manner of His working may have seemed to be, He has really wrought in love, and has done all things well. But the time for these explanations is not yet; and man must win life's battle by faith, not by sight. Meanwhile a blessing is promised to him who can wait patiently, trusting God where he cannot trace the way of His working or fathom the mystery of His plan.

¶ It is not for the workmen who are engaged in the construction of a magnificent pile which is to be the wonder and admiration of the ages to have a clear knowledge of the architectural ideal. All they need know is how to use the tools that have been placed in their hands; all they need be anxious about is the particular piece of wall given them to build. They labour necessarily in the dark. All they need be assured of is that they are working under the guidance and inspiration of the great Master-Builder. Be true, be honest, be diligent, be faithful, fill the particular position into which Providence hath introduced you as well as it can be filled by the grace of God, and the great Architect under whose superintendence the vast structure is being upreared will take care of the congruities and harmonies. Do not agitate yourself with questions which are beyond your capacity to understand. Do not permit the inexplicable and the perplexing in human phenomena to disquiet you. Do not obtrude into the domain of the Infinite. "Go thou thy way."[1]

In sorrow and in nakedness of soul
I look into the street,
If haply there mine eye may meet
As up and down it ranges,

[1] B. D. Thomas,

The servants of my father bearing changes
Of raiment sweet—
Seven changes sweet with violet and moly,
Seven changes pure and holy.

But nowhere 'mid the thick entangled throng
Mark I their proud sad paces,
Nowhere the light upon their faces
Serene with that great beauty
Wherein the singly meditated duty
Its empire traces:—
Only the fretful merchants stand and cry—
"Come buy! come buy! come buy!"

And the big bales are drunk with all the purple
That wells in vats of Tyre,
And unrolled damasks stream with golden fire,
And broideries of Ind,
And, piled on Polar furs, are braveries winned
From far Gadire.
And I am waiting, abject, cold, and numb,
Yet sure that they will come.

O naked soul, be patient in this stead!
Thrice blest are they that wait.
O Father of my soul, the gate
Will open soon, and they
Who minister to Thee and Thine alway
Will enter straight,
And speak to me that I shall understand
The speech of Thy great land.

And I will rise, and wash, and they will dress me
As Thou would'st have me dressed;
And I shall stand confest
Thy son; and men shall falter—
"Behold the ephod of the unseen altar!
O God-possessed!
Thy raiment is not from the looms of earth,
But has a Heavenly birth."[1]

3. The time of every man's service comes to an end. Some work for a longer and others for a shorter time in the vineyard,

[1] T. E. Brown, *Old John and Other Poems*, 152.

but with each one the night comes when no man can work. One just begins his labours when he is cut down in the midst of his days, and hurried away to give in his account. Another has to bear the burden and heat of the day, and is spared to be an old disciple, that his matured piety may shine as a heavenly light in a dark world. But with all, the dismission time comes at last. "Our fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" Surely the thought should solemnize us all, and especially when we consider that the time is not only short, but very uncertain. Surely what we are to do for the salvation of our own souls, we should do now, giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure. And what we are to do for the good of our fellow-men, and for the glory of our Lord, we should do earnestly, as we have opportunity from day to day. To-day only is ours. To-morrow we may never see. The call is emphatic: "Go work *to-day* in my vineyard"—not to-morrow, or at any future time, but to-day, now, at this present hour, while opportunity offers and life lasts.

¶ How earnestly he now set himself to make the most of life in a religious sense appears from a sort of aphorism on conduct which he wrote down originally for his own use, and afterwards communicated as a parting gift to his friend Farrar [afterwards Dean of Canterbury], who was about to become a master at Marlborough School. As a record of the spirit in which Maxwell entered at three-and-twenty on his independent career, this fragment is of extraordinary value.

"He that would enjoy life and act with freedom must have the work of the day continually before his eyes. Not yesterday's work, lest he fall into despair, nor to-morrow's, lest he become a visionary,—not that which ends with the day, which is a worldly work, nor yet that only which remains to eternity, for by it he cannot shape his actions.

"Happy is the man who can recognize in the work of To-day a connected portion of the work of life, and an embodiment of the work of Eternity. The foundations of his confidence are unchangeable, for he has been made a partaker of Infinity. He strenuously works out his daily enterprises, because the present is given him for a possession.

"Thus ought Man to be an impersonation of the Divine process of nature, and to show forth the union of the infinite with the finite, not slighting his temporal existence, remembering that in

it only is individual action possible, nor yet shutting out from his view that which is eternal, knowing that Time is a mystery which man cannot endure to contemplate until eternal Truth enlighten it."[1]

4. God says not only to individuals — to each of His own servants, when he has done his work—"Go thou thy way." He says it to communities of men and witnesses for the truth. He says it to churches. He says it to generations. He says it to worlds—to one world after another: "Go thou thy way." What power of will and thought is His which can develop itself in fulness only through all the worlds and along all the ages! How great is His patience, which waits and is never weary, until the evil is vanquished and the good is triumphant at last! And how vast is His providence, by which the whole is wrought out! All thoughts and plans and systems of man, all passions, all pursuits, all births and deaths of individuals and of nations, all histories of races,—everything is in the providence and plan of God. Some things are inserted and sustained directly by Himself, some things by the exercise of the free choice of His creatures; but everything is ruled and used for the accomplishment of His ultimate and perfect will.

¶ The patience and long-suffering of God should be another subject of continual thanksgiving. Is it not wonderful how He has borne with us, and we so miserably perverse the while? What a miracle of patience God has been! Can we not enter into the spirit of that Spanish lady of whom Father Rho speaks, who said, "That if she had to build a church in honour of the attributes of God, she would dedicate it to the Divine Patience"? Even the heathen Emperor Antoninus thanked God for the occasions of sin to which he had never been exposed. This, then, is another personal blessing for which we must always be giving thanks. St. Chrysostom, also, would have us remember with special gratitude the hidden and unknown blessings which God has heaped upon us. "God," he says, "is an over-running fountain of clemency, flowing upon us, and round about us, even when we know it not." In this matter Father Peter Faber was remarkable. He used to say there were hardly any blessings we ought more scrupulously to thank God for than those we never asked, and those which come to us without our knowing it. It is not unlikely, in the case of many of us, that these hidden blessings may

[1] L. Campbell and W. Garnett, *The Life of James Clerk Maxwell*, 200.

turn out at the Last Day to have been the very hinges on which our lives turned, and that through them our Predestination has been worked out, and our Eternal Rest secured.[1]

II.

Rest.

"For thou shalt rest."

1. In the circumstances in which he was placed Daniel needed this word of comfort. He was made aware that the Church would pass through many trials and have a chequered history, before the glory of the latter day should be ushered in. He was led to believe that a long period would intervene between his own day and the end to which he was told to look forward. He could not be otherwise than full of anxiety regarding the future, and the promise of the text was given him for his consolation. He was to receive no further information as to the coming events, but he was assured that he need have no anxiety concerning his own safety, for he should rest and stand in his lot at the end of the days.

¶ Desire for rest is not at any time the mere desire for the cessation of fatigue; all true rest means the consciousness of a growing renewal of the powers exhausted by fatigue, and the shrinking with which old age regards the heavy burdens of life is not in the least a quailing of the mind, but solely a yearning of the body for what it needs more and more every day, and yet gains less and less—true renovation. The desire for rest is the desire for more life, though in disguise,—the belief that more life is, under some great change of conditions, actually before us.[2]

2. The gospel holds out a present rest, real and wonderful, to men believing. There is rest, indeed, in receiving the reconciliation, the redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of all trespasses. There is a rest also, that arises in the new order and harmony of the soul brought home to God. The believer in Christ has reached a foundation that cannot be shaken; he has

[1] *The Spirit of Father Faber* (1914), 148.

[2] R. H. Hutton, *Criticisms on Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, ii. 142.

found a spring in which is resource enough for all service, and consolation enough against all sorrow. God is with him; Christ is with him; the Spirit of all grace is with him. Therefore there must be in his state an element of rest. This faith lies at the root of all that a believer is and does.

And so it comes to pass that, as the servants of God go through this world, whatever toil befalls them is in a very emphatic manner mingled with actual ministries of rest, imparted to them by their Lord. These fall in, in time of need, fitly and effectually; the heart is calmed and cheered, the feeling of strength and resource revives, the man draws breath and looks around, his courage rises to set forth again. Indeed, it is part of God's common bounty towards men; and men must take no common pains in sin, to deprive themselves of a large experience of it. No man runs the race of life all in one heat. There are innumerable breaks in life from which, in some sense, new beginnings offer themselves. Morning succeeds morning, and season follows season. And ever between come soothing influences that persuade the relentless past to relax its grasp a little, so that rest renews the man. Thus it is in human life generally. But in Christian life it takes place in a quite peculiar manner; for in Christian lives grace and providence join together to care for this interest of rest with a wise and loving completeness. A Christian may be exercised with hard and perplexing trial. But yet he must have, and he has, such a measure of rest mingled and infused as a Father sees to be most meet for him.

¶ It is a good saying of Edgar Quinet, born of much trying experience, "The unknown very often saves us. It is probable that what one fears will not happen, and that we find blessings we never thought of." But that is only a fragment of that vaster faith which saintly souls have reached, souls that have penetrated life to its centre and found God there. Has any finer prescription for inner rest been given than this? It is from the *Imitatio*, "When a man cometh to that estate that he seeketh not his comfort from any creature. then first doth God begin to be altogether sweet to him. Then shall he be contented with whatsoever doth befall him in this world. Then shall he neither rejoice in great matters, nor be sorrowful in small, but entirely and confidently committeth himself to God, who is unto him all in all."

Assuredly there is the secret and the centre of rest. At home with God, we are at home in His world, in His universe. No part in it, no realities of it, will be to us strange or terrifying. Under all circumstances we shall discern His laws, which are His holy will. And they are all our friends. This central rest, which He invites us to, is the ground and condition of all fine achievement.[1]

3. Then there is the final rest—the rest after toil, when the day's work is done. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours." Even the earthly part rests in the grave, where the "weary" are "at rest." But the better part, "sleeping in Jesus," is carried to Paradise, to the stillness of the blessed dead, to the waiting yet happy and restful company of sainted souls.

Take the earthly analogy. What is so welcome to a tired worker from the fields, when night falls, as rest? Or to a traveller who has come over the mountains, and been on the way since the sun rose, until now that he has set? Would you propose to such weary men some new enterprises, asking them to join you at once in some new endeavour? They would say "No, we are tired now—let the night be gone, we will speak with you in the morning." Such, and so welcome, is the rest of the grave, and the sleep of death to God's children when they are weary.

Rest, weary soul!
The penalty is borne, the ransom paid,
For all thy sins, full satisfaction made,—
Strive not to do thyself, what Christ has done,
Claim the free gift, and make the joy thine own!
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distrest,
Rest, sweetly rest!

Rest, weary heart!
From all thy silent griefs, and secret pain,
Thy profitless regrets, and longings vain,—
Wisdom and love have ordered all the past,
All shall be blessedness and light, at last!
Cast off the cares that have so long opprest,
Rest, sweetly rest!

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties* (1914), 250.

Rest, weary head!
Lie down to slumber, in the peaceful tomb,
Light from above has broken through its gloom,—
Here in the place, where once thy Saviour lay,
Where He shall wake thee, on a future day,
Like a tired child upon its mother's breast,
Rest, sweetly rest!

Rest, spirit free!
In the green pastures of the heavenly shore,
Where sin and sorrow can approach no more,—
With all the flock by the Good Shepherd fed,
Beside the streams of life eternal led,
For ever with thy God and Saviour blest,
Rest, sweetly rest!

III.

Recompense.

"Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

1. The form into which the closing word of the Divine message falls at once brings up before our mental vision a picture of the Hebrew newly put into possession of his inheritance in the Promised Land, and rising to survey the allotment which is now his own. Freed from the toil of wandering in the dreary way of the desert, he has attained what in the old days he had dreamed of as his "rest." But it is a sphere, not of idleness, but of work, that he has found. His allotment will henceforth require care, and only as he brings to bear upon it his best efforts and utmost skill will the owner realize all its possibilities of enrichment and of blessing. The whole conditions are, however, completely changed, and between the present happy service upon his own inheritance and his former weary toiling in the way of the desert comparison is not even possible.

After the weariness of life man may well need rest, and such rest will be bestowed. But that is not God's last word to man, not in that does the fulness of the great inheritance of the followers of Christ lie. The Divine promise looks beyond the rest to glorious activity; and, with spirit and body wholly restored and

altogether whole and strong, there is opened up before the eye of faith a vista of the noblest and most exultant service that can be conceived, and reaching away into the eternal future further than even faith can see. To His weary children everywhere the Great Father says, "Thou shalt rest"; but He goes on to add the last word, which is of service, not of rest, and as such rounds off and completes what is in deed and in truth a message of hope to every child of man.

¶ Ward and Faber delighted in the imaginative picturing of the supernatural world with the simple directness of the ages of faith, and in startling contrast to the vague atmosphere of modern thought on matters of dogma. The Oratorian fathers who remember that time recall Ward's presence during the recreation hour after dinner, at Old Hall, when he and Faber, eager talkers alike, both "of mighty presence," with immense vocabularies, with equal positiveness of logic and superlativeness of rhetoric, sat opposite each other capping epigrams and anecdotes, while the other fathers were gathered round in a ring. One point of debate —parallel to the mediæval questions as to the habitual occupations of the angels—was the nature of our future employments in the next world. Of what kind is the daily life in heaven? "Take Stewart for example," asks Ward, referring to the well-known and kind-hearted theological bookseller, "what can he find to do there?" Various suggestions are made. "Bind the Book of Life," Ward proposes. "But that won't last for ever!" Faber replies. "He and St. Jerome will talk without ceasing."—"Ah, but he will never be happy without work." Other plans are suggested till Faber hits on the best. "I have it—he should catalogue the angels."[1]

2. It is an individual lot—*thy* lot. God is the true inheritance. Each man has his own portion of the common possession; or, to put it into plainer words, in that perfect land each individual has precisely as much of God as he is capable of possessing. "Thou shalt stand in thy lot." And what determines the lot is how we wend our way till that other end, the end of life. "The end of the days" is a period far beyond the end of the life of Daniel. And as the course that terminated in repose has been, so the possession of "the portion of the inheritance of the saints in light" shall be, for which that course has made men

[1] *William George Ward and the Catholic Revival*, 64.

meet. Destiny is character worked out. A man will be where he is fit to be, and have what he is fit for. Time is the lackey of eternity. His life here settles how much of God a man shall be able to hold when he stands in his lot at the "end of the days." And his allotted portion, as it stretches around him, will be but the issue and the outcome of his life here on earth.

The faithful servant may have been disappointed with the results of his efforts in this life, but at the end of the days he shall find the work in which he bore a part perfected. In the wisdom of God the great result shall emerge fully achieved, bearing no trace of imperfection.

And he shall find his own labour in it. His works follow him. Every effort made in faith and humility has its recognized and honourable place. It was not thrown away; it was not a failure after all. So, when God subjects His servants to that discipline which the most eminent of them, and those that have served most faithfully, have experienced, He is not sending them away as useless servants. Not so. Only the *manifestation* of the grace with which He gladdens them is delayed till all can rejoice together. They are lost to our view for a while. When they reappear, they come "bringing their sheaves with them." Yes, they come, not with sheaves only, as labourers whose work abides, but with wreaths also, as conquerors who have overcome, partakers in a victory that has become complete and eternal. "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days."

¶ Geologists used to be divided into two schools, one of whom explained everything by invoking great convulsions, the other by appealing to the uniform action of laws. There are no convulsions in life. To-morrow is the child of to-day, and yesterday was the father of this day. What we are springs from what we have been, and settles what we shall be. The road leads some-whither, and we follow it step by step. As the old nursery rhyme has it—

> One foot up and one foot down,
> That's the way to London Town.[1]

3. Of this lot no one can dispossess us. The term "stand" suggests the completeness and permanence of the new life. It is

[1] Alexander Maclaren, *The Beatitudes*, 256.

no longer, "Go thy way" as a changing, dying creature; no longer "Thou shalt rest," after labour, in some repeated friendly sleep, as of a new death, while other battles are fought, while earth and heaven go surging through another trial, and hell opens once more. "*Thou shalt stand.*" Here at last is fixity of tenure. Here is possession of the incorruptible and undefiled inheritance. Here is the life begun, which has only to develop, and blossom, and shine in the light of God for ever.

"Thou shalt stand," no one dislodging thee, no one evicting thee, no one threatening thee, through the endless ages of eternity. Of how many settlements here upon earth can the same thing be said? We take our place in these settlements, and we speak of them as our lot, saying, "Soul, take thine ease and be satisfied." But the settlement becomes unsettled. The lot is broken up. Here have we no continuing city. Our homes, our estates, they abide not. They abide not because of change. They abide not because of death. And the wind whistles, and the rain drips, and the icicles hang in many a pleasant bower where once the roses bloomed, and once the sweet birds sang. And wilt thou set thy heart upon that which fades? "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." For "the world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." May such be our attitude, may such be our position, as those whom no charge can impugn, no convulsion shake, no temptation overthrow, no vicissitude assail, but who stand in the end of the days—ay, and beyond the end—secure and irrevocable in their eternal lot.

¶ One day when Andrew Hichens sat beside him while he rested in his niche, they talked of *Paradise Lost* and its first small market value; and Signor quoted a contemporary of Milton's who wrote, "The old blind school-master hath writ a book, which, if it hath not the merit of length, it hath none other," and added that now, perhaps, it was the second book of the world. "It shows," he went on, "that the most unreal, the spiritual portion of man, is the most real and lasting." Whatever doubts he may have had about the ultimate place his work should be given, of the dignity of his calling and of his aims he was absolutely certain. Professor Gilbert Murray's words, "There seems to be in human effort a part that is progressive and transient, and another that is stationary and eternal," are words he would have answered to with his whole being.

The true question to ask is this, "Has it helped any human soul?"—Signor's own word—and he continued: "It is said of literature, but is equally applicable to art. I think the great sculptor of the Parthenon must have done so. Gothic cathedrals certainly have. Yet these which conferred actual and immortal life were, to the masses of the nation intent upon eating, drinking, fighting, and getting rich, but vague and visionary complements to the more material and important considerations of everyday life. Paradox as it may seem to be, it is safe to assert that the most visionary manifestations of human activity have ever proved to be the most solidly based, and are the most permanent."[1]

[1] *George Frederic Watts*, ii. 275.

The Valley of Achor.

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The Valley of Achor.

And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.—Hos. ii. 15.

The Prophet Hosea is remarkable for the frequent use which he makes of events in the former history of his people. Their past seems to him a mirror in which they may read their future. He believes that that "which is to be hath already been," the great principles of the Divine government living on through all the ages, and issuing in similar acts when the circumstances are similar. So he foretells that there will yet be once more a captivity and a bondage, that the old story of the wilderness will be repeated once more. In that wilderness God will speak to the heart of Israel. Its barrenness will be changed into the fruitfulness of vineyards, where the purpling clusters hang ripe for the thirsty travellers. And not only will the sorrows that He sends thus become sources of refreshment, but the gloomy gorge through which they journey—the valley of Achor—will be a door of hope.

One of the psalms gives us, in different form, a metaphor and a promise substantially the same as that of this text. "Blessed are they who, passing through the valley of Weeping, make it a well." They gather their tears, as it were, into the cisterns by the wayside, and draw refreshment and strength from their very sorrows, and then, when in their wise husbandry they have thus irrigated the soil with the gathered results of their sorrows, the heavens bend over them, and weep their gracious tears, and "the rain also covereth it with blessings."

I.

The Valley of Promise.

The valley of Achor was to the Israelites the key to the possession of Palestine. It was a valley lying to the north of

Jericho, between it and the highlands beyond. It was the first land upon which the Israelites entered after they crossed the Jordan, and the walls of Jericho fell flat to the ground. Hard by the city of palm trees was the fertile valley of Achor. If ever the Israelites in captivity were to go back again, they must enter Palestine by the same door if they crossed the Jordan at all; the key of the position was the valley of Achor, the first region of which they would have to take possession if they wished to win the rest of the land.

Such was its physical formation that in a most literal sense the valley of Achor was a door of hope, for in front of the Israelites, as they wound through the pass, there lay at the far end of the vista the smiling vineyards and yellow cornfields and peaceful blue hills of the Promised Land. So does the Redeemer lead those to whose hearts He has spoken, assuring them of reconciliation and peace with Himself. Every winding in the avenue of life reveals a blessing that is richer than the blessings they at present enjoy. They are lured from grace unto grace, and from strength unto strength. Mercy joins hand with mercy. Each good thing received becomes the pledge and the foretaste of a better which God hath prepared for as many as love Him.

¶ There was an old English custom by which a man took possession of an estate "by turf and twig." A sod of the turf and a twig from a tree were given to him. This was a token that the whole estate, with everything which grew upon it, was his property. And so, when Jesus whispered into your ear, and gave you the assurance of reconciliation with the Father, and fellowship with Himself, He did, as it were, give you the whole land of promise. The richest enjoyment of the believer is yours. You have the foretaste, and that is the pledge that you shall yet enter into the possession of the whole. However great the promise, however rich may be its treasure, it is all yours. You have not yet fed upon the clusters of its vineyards, but it is all yours; because, in taking possession of your first enjoyment, you have virtually claimed the whole. It was said of William the Conqueror, when he landed here, that he stumbled; but, clutching a handful of earth, he hailed it as a happy omen, saying that, in taking possession of that handful of earth, he had taken all England for his own. And you, who, on your bended knees fell prostrate before God in that first rich treasure of joy which came into your

souls—you took possession of all the inheritance of the saints on earth, and of their inheritance in heaven.[1]

II.

The Valley of Trouble.

1. The valley of Achor became the scene of a great tragedy. Just after the capture of Jericho, at the time when the chosen people had invaded the Land of Promise, it came to light that a certain man, Achan, "the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah," had taken a portion of the spoil which ought to have been reserved for the treasury of God Himself; he had hidden it in his tent, and it had brought defeat upon the whole army, and now he was found out. His sin had been brought home to him, and "all Israel stoned him with stones until he died," and "they raised over him," says the sacred historian, "a great heap of stones, unto this day. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The Valley of Achor (*i.e.*, the Valley of Troubling), unto this day."

It was treachery that Achan had been guilty of. He had been the friend of the friends of God; he had gone in and out with them; he had shared their hopes, their efforts, their successes. Who can doubt that in the service of the sanctuary he had knelt side by side with those upon whom he was bringing at that very time the curse of shame? This is what makes sin always most sinful and shameful—its treachery. We do not suspect it. We do not believe it. We are not armed as we might have been against it. The poison spreads and spreads, and nobody knows it. "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel."

¶ Leaving the ten gulfs of torment, where fraud meets its due, the pilgrims, by the aid of a giant, are lowered into the last dismal pit of hell. This nethermost circle is buried in the heart of the earth; it is the region of pitiless cold; every spark of warm love is banished from this spot where treachery is punished. When the false heart has sold itself to the deceit which works evil against those to whom it is bound by ties of

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

blood or gratitude, love flies from it. In such a chill heart pity cannot dwell; and, alas! the penalty of evil is to place itself under influences which tend to perpetuate the evil. The false, cold heart dwells where the icy blast does but intensify its coldness; the breath which beats upon it freezes all it touches. This, the possession of a heart out of which love has perished, is the last doom of sin! The Psalmist, who delineated the downward progress of sin, expressed the final stage as the incapacity to hate evil; man at the worst is the man of whom it can be said, "Neither doth he abhor that which is evil." [1]

2. The sin was discovered and confessed. Slowly but surely the sin was brought home to the sinner. First it was fixed upon a tribe—"the tribe of Judah was taken"—then upon a house, the house of Zabdi, then finally upon the guilty man. "And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken." Observe what follows. The words of Joshua seem strange and hard at first. "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me." They are strange words, indeed, and hard. "Give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel." But it is best that the truth should come to light. It is dreadful that sin should exist, but more dreadful that it should exist and not be known. When it comes to light, although the revelation be heartbreaking, although it prove not only weakness but wickedness, yes, and wickedness in the hated form of cruelty and treachery, to exist in the very heart of God's people, let us be thankful at least that we know how bad we are or may be. Let us "give glory to the Lord God of Israel."

Confession unto God—that is the first thing. For it is He whom we have grievously offended. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." And then confession unto man. He who will tell all the truth in the hour of his judgment is not so bad as he who departs with a lie upon his lips.

¶ His soul was thirsting for confession as pilgrims in a desert thirst for the spring of living water. When sin warps the soul

[1] W. B. Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 88.

out of line, repentance springs it back again to its normal place. He who has pondered long life's deepest problems knows that memory holds no dearer recollection than hours when the erring child moves from sin toward confession and forgiveness. Disobedient, the child fears the parent's disapproval. Dreading the discovery, it conceals that sin through deceit. Soon the sweetness of the stolen pleasure passes away. Remorse makes a dark cloud to overshadow the child. Each moment increases the gloom. And when the darkness falls, and the prayers are said, and the light is turned out, and the mother's kiss leaves the child alone, with solitude comes increased sorrow. Because its first lie is a sin greater than it can bear, the child calls aloud, and flinging itself into the arms of the returning mother, in a wild, passionate abandon of tears and sobs pours forth the full story of its sin, and, mingling its torrent with the parent's tears, is cleansed in that deep fountain named the mother's heart. What hour in life holds a happiness so deep and sweet as that hour of confession and forgiveness for the child, when it falls asleep, having recovered its simplicity? And men are but children grown tall and strong.[1]

3. The sin was expiated. The "accursed thing" had brought upon the Israelites disaster and defeat. The accursed thing must therefore by Divine command be put away. And it was put away with unflinching rigour in the valley of Achor. A trying day it must have been for the Israelites when they were called upon to stone to death one of their own brethren. Some may have shrunk back from the performance of so stern and painful a duty. Others may have wished that the punishment might be commuted into another less severe. But no. The guilty person must be put to death. And, at whatever expense of feeling on their part, he must die by the hands of his brethren.

There is a terrible sweepingness, an unsparingness, which startles and astonishes us in the work of judgment executed by the Israelites at the command of Jehovah. "And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the mantle, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them up unto the valley of

[1] N. D. Hillis, *Great Books as Life-Teachers*, 108.

Achor. And they burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones."

¶ It does seem hard sometimes that the sons and daughters of Achan were made to share in the dreadful punishment of their father. And here it is by no means sufficient to say with a recent writer, who means at least to be religious, that the history before us only illustrates the sanguinary severity of Oriental nations, which has in all ages involved the children in the punishment of their father, for we cannot but remember that the Jews had received a law which has specially insisted on the sacredness of human life, and it is difficult to see how the slaughter in question was other than a high crime against the Sixth Commandment, unless it could appeal to some independent principle, which justified and explained it. It is, indeed, more than probable that Achan's family were, to a certain extent, accomplices in his sin. They must have been privy to the concealment of the stolen spoil in the tent, and they knew what was involved in stealing and in concealing it. But, besides this, we cannot doubt that Achan and his family are here regarded as forming in some sense, a moral whole, and not simply as a set of individuals, each of whom was on his or her trial. Scripture does take these two views of human beings. Sometimes it treats us as each one entirely separate from all besides, both in probation and in judgment; and sometimes it merges the individual in a wider association of which he forms a part; and whether it be the family, or the race, or the church, or humanity, it merges him in it so completely as to treat him as though he were merely a limb of the great whole to which he belongs; and both of these views of men are true to, and they are based on, the nature of things, since man is by the terms of his creation at once a personal being complete in himself, and yet a part of a larger organism—the human family. On the first of these aspects the gospel, no doubt, specially insists, but it does not by any means ignore or dispense with the second. When the Apostle tells us that in Adam all die, and that by one man sin came into the world, and death by sin, he treats every descendant of Adam as part of a family which is united in its natural head, and which is fatally compromised by the acts of that head. This principle of the reality of a common nature which we all share explains our loss of righteousness in Adam; but it tells to our advantage even more decisively, for it explains our recovery of righteousness in Christ. "In Christ shall all be made alive." "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." [1]

[1] H. P. Liddon.

III.

The Valley of Hope.

The valley of Achor became a door of hope. It was in truth a terrific act of penal retribution by which Achan and his family met their death, and it requires an effort to ask ourselves how the spot which witnessed this scene of torture and of shame could be a door of hope. It was a door of hope for Israel, because Achan's sin, while undiscovered, had about it this terrible distinction, that in an eminent degree it brought with it weakness and ruin to the public cause of Israel. Israel was not fully pure-hearted while the Babylonian robe which ought to have been burnt, and the gold and silver which ought to have been placed in the treasury of the Lord, were sacrilegiously hidden away in the earth beneath Achan's tent; and a serious effort, like the attack on Ai, revealed the presence of moral unsoundness somewhere, which, so long as it festered at the heart of Israel, made further progress impossible. When Achan had been discovered and punished, Israel's weakness at once disappeared. The Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger, and Ai fell easily before the first assault.

The punishment of the transgressor in that case, and the putting away of sin in connexion with penitence and prayer, reopened, after defeat, the door of hope, and restored the enjoyment of Divine help. The discomfiture that so troubled the host of Israel was immediately followed by the victory at Ai, which inspired them with the hope of soon possessing the whole land. So with Israel after the Captivity—a dreary night of weeping was followed by a bright and blessed morning. So, too, in time to come, when, after a long and sorrowful expectation, Israel shall return from the lands of their exile to their fatherland, or by faith and repentance to the paternal God, the light of better and more hopeful days shall dawn upon them.

1. The valley of Achor runs through the life of the world. Trouble is not young. The story of the earth is full of tragedy. Sin and penalty crowd into the experience of man. God leads us into struggle and difficulty. We ought to be glad, and we

are glad when we are wise, that it *is* part of the order of human living that God does not suffer us always to be in the presence of a weakening, enervating, and destructive prosperity. When we have been emasculated by our continuous successes, He breaks the thread, and flings us upon defeat, so that we may learn that our truest success is in character, not in fortune; in the building up of manhood, not in accumulation of coin; in the discipline of the will and the subordination of our spirit to Him, and not in fleeting and transitory pleasures. Hosea does not try to hide from us that the valley of Achor is a valley of trouble by calling it by some other name. You do not change facts by changing the terms in which you describe them; and though you may assert that the sorrow is unreal, that it is entirely imaginary, if the iron is going into your soul all such assertions will be simply an increase of irritation and pain. We cannot, when the pressure is heaviest, and the burden is bearing us down to the earth so that we cannot stand on our feet—we cannot accept illusory terms, as if, forsooth, they altered actual facts. No! trouble is a reality in life. The sin that causes the trouble, that is the spring of it, that makes the penalty inevitable, that compels the God of righteousness and order to inflict it—that is the horrible reality, and we must treat it for what it really is, and then, and then only, is there a chance of our hearing and welcoming the good news of redemption.

¶ No man would sin, if he could realize beforehand the prolonged agony of his act. If sin could foresee the end of its careless journey, it would shudder, instead of laughing along its route; and if it could see the pit beneath the golden bracken, the black swamp beneath the emerald moss, the cunning snare across the pleasant pasture, the gap on the dark bridge, or the worm in the mellow fruit, it would alter its hasty course, and seek to change its nature. The chief mission of righteousness is the merciful relieving of sin's born-blindness.[1]

2. Sanctified trouble is the door of hope, the herald of victory and rest. Faith amid trouble opens the way to the Promised Land. The figure which Hosea employs to convey this is very expressive. The narrow gorge stretches before us, with its dark overhanging cliffs that almost shut out the sky; the path is rough

[1] E. G. Cheyne, *The Man with the Mirror*, 114.

and set with sharp stones; it is narrow, winding, steep; often it seems to be barred by some huge rock that juts across it, and there is barely room for the broken ledge yielding slippery footing between the beetling crag above and the steep slope beneath that dips so quickly to the black torrent below. All is gloomy, damp, hard; and if we look upwards the glen becomes more savage as it rises, and armed foes hold the very throat of the pass. But, however long, however barren, however rugged, however trackless the valley may be, we may see a bright form descending the rocky way with radiant eyes and calm lips, God's messenger, Hope; and the rough rocks are like the doorway through which she comes near to us in our weary struggle.

That bright form which comes down the narrow valley is God's messenger and herald—sent before His face. All the light of Hope is the reflection on our hearts of the light of God. Her silver beams, which shed quietness over the darkness of earth, come only from that great Sun. If our hope is to grow out of our sorrow, it must be because our sorrow drives us to God. It is only when we by faith stand in His grace, and live in the conscious fellowship of peace with Him, that we rejoice in hope. If we would see Hope drawing near to us, we must fix our eyes not on Jericho that lies behind among its palm trees, though it has memories of conquests, and attractions of fertility and repose, nor on the corpse that lies below that pile of stones, nor on the narrow way and the strong enemy in front there; but higher up, on the blue sky that spreads peaceful above the highest summits of the pass, and from the heavens we shall see the angel coming to us. Sorrow forsakes its own nature, and leads in its own opposite, when sorrow helps us to see God. It clears away the thick trees, and lets the sunlight into the forest shades, and then in time corn will grow. Hope is but the brightness that goes before God's face, and if we would see it we must look at Him.

¶ I remember once, in the south of Europe, descending about sunset into a deep solemn valley, circled in by precipitous mountains, and shadowed over with dark pine groves. It seemed as if we were about to lose sight of the day, and of the gladness of nature, and to descend, with Jonah, to the bottoms of the mountains. But, in the perpendicular rocks on the opposite side

there was a deep breach or cleft, and right up to this our path pointed. Now, through that rift the setting sun was pouring such a golden glory that it seemed the path to a better world; and I thought then, and I think now, that the deep gloom of the valley, and the brightness which we could not reach save by descending into it, were no bad types of the light affliction which is but for a moment, and the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory hereafter.[1]

¶ Russel Wallace tells us that one of the most peculiar and least generally considered features of our earth, but one which is also essential to the development and maintenance of the rich organic life it possesses, is the uninterrupted supply of atmospheric dust which is now known to be necessary for the production of rain clouds and beneficial rains and mists, and without which the whole course of meteorological phenomena would be so changed as to endanger the very existence of a large portion of the life upon the earth. Now, the chief portion of this fine dust, distributed through the upper atmosphere, from the equator to the poles, with wonderful uniformity, is derived from those great terrestrial features which are often looked upon as the least essential, and even as blots and blemishes on the fair face of nature—deserts and volcanoes. Most persons, no doubt, think they could both be very well spared, and that the earth would be greatly improved from a human point of view, if they were altogether abolished. Yet it is almost a certainty that the consequences of doing so would be to render the earth infinitely less enjoyable, and, perhaps, altogether uninhabitable by man.

In most human lives are periods closely corresponding with the deserts of the earth; times and conditions distinctly stale, flat, and apparently unprofitable; spaces of compulsory isolation and solitariness; seasons of intellectual infertility and depression; stretches of drudgery; tedious spells of personal affliction; times of enforced inaction; years of dullness, dreariness, and barrenness. Destitute of the ordinary interests, excitements, and charms of life, we may justly reckon such periods as constituting the wilderness stages of our pilgrimage. Of these monotonous interludes we think and speak regretfully. They are looked upon as the waste part of life, the days when we simply marked time, when we ploughed the sand. What the desert is to nature, a blot and blemish, that, we conclude, are the grey featureless terms of human life. Yet may we not be mistaken about our dreary days and years as we are in our estimate of the worth of deserts in the system of nature? As Dr. Wallace reminds

[1] J. M. Neale.

us, indirectly we get our vineyards from the Sahara; and is it any more difficult to believe that what we are tempted to call the waste places of life fulfil a mission similarly benign and precious?[1]

3. The prophet speaks out of his own experience. He is telling what he himself has gone through. He had married a sweet and lovely girl in her purity and charm, and she had become an unfaithful wife. She that had been the guardian of his home, the spring of his happiness, the source of his strength, was disloyal; she was an adulteress, and the man's heart was rent, and in anguish he looked up to God. But how had he borne it? He had come out of the great tribulation, and washed his robes and cleansed his heart from all hatred and revenge, and ascended to loftier heights of spiritual power than he had ever known before, to larger conceptions of God's pity and love. The valley of Achor—that is, the valley of troubling—had been the door through which he ascended to the highlands of the spiritual order—the heavenly places of God.

Hosea found his gospel where he found God—in himself; but he did not keep it to himself. He gave it to others. He turned the materials of his own experience into the means by which he became a Barnabas, a son of consolation. As one of our best teachers says: "He saw God in the tragedies of his life. He heard the voice of God in the sorrow and shame of his own home; and so, led by the love he still bore to his sinful wife, he became the messenger of Divine love and mercy to God's sinful people."

¶ John Bunyan, in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, talking about the Valley of Humiliation, says that "it is the most fruitful valley that ever crow flew over." So it is. Where do we look when we want to feed our faith—when we ask for something that shall enable us to set our feet down firmly, to stand loyal to our conviction, true to our principle? We go back to the Valleys of Achor; see the men who suffer like heroes, passing through, rising high, doing their work whole-heartedly; and we are stiffened in conviction and sustained in conflict. Yes. "Call to remembrance the former generations," turn over the history of human progress, and what do you come upon? Valleys of Achor. The greatest, the best souls go through them, and go through to the widest service of mankind. John Morley asks—

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Ashes of Roses*, 98.

"To what quarter in the large historic firmament can we turn our eyes with such certainty of being stirred and elevated to thinking better of human life, and of the worth of those who have been most deeply penetrated by its seriousness, as to the annals of those intrepid spirits whom the Protestant doctrine of the indefeasible personal responsibility brought to the front in the sixteenth century in Germany, and in the seventeenth century in Scotland?"[1]

The wilderness shall blossom
  Beneath Thy ray benign
And Achor, with its vale of woe,
  Shall spring with Hope Divine;
Thy resurrection power
  Transforms the dreary scene,
Abundant blossom shall appear,
  Where all had cankered been.

The earthly clod is helpless,
  All, all the power is Thine,
The seedling and the fruitage fair,
  The shower and the shine;
To Thee be all the glory,
  To Thee resultant praise,
Eternity will still unfold
  The wonder of Thy Ways.

[1] J. Clifford, *The Gospel of Gladness*, 36.

The Blessing of the Dew.

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The Blessing of the Dew.

I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.—Hos. xiv. 5, 6.

Hosea was a poet as well as a prophet. His little prophecy is full of similes and illustrations drawn from natural objects; scarcely any of them from cities or from the ways of men; almost all of them from Nature as seen in the open country, which he evidently loved, and where he had looked upon things with a clear and meditative eye. This whole chapter is full of emblems drawn from plant life. The lily, the cedar, the olive, are mentioned in the text. And there follow, in the subsequent verses, the corn, and the vine, and the green fir tree.

The words, no doubt, originally had reference to the numerical increase of the people and their restoration to their land, but they may be taken by us quite fairly as having a very much deeper and more blessed reference than that. For they describe the uniform condition of all spiritual life and growth—"I will be as the dew unto Israel"; and then they set forth some of the manifold aspects of that growth, and the consequences of receiving that heavenly dew, under the various metaphors which are employed.

I.

The Dew.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel."

1. This points us to the source of fruitfulness, the secret of beauty, growth, and strength. Dew is so copious in Palestine that it supplies to some extent the absence of rain. It is of great importance to the agriculturist. In several passages of Scripture

it is coupled in the Divine blessing with rain, or is mentioned as a chief source of fertility; and its withdrawal is attributed to a curse.

¶ Dew is the water of the atmosphere deposited in minute globules upon the earth. It does not fall, in the ordinary sense of the term; but after the sun has set, and the supply of heat is cut off, vegetation that has been warmed by its rays and has absorbed them, radiates its heat back into space and becomes rapidly cooled, until it becomes lower in temperature than the surrounding air. The result is that the moisture from the lower stratum of air is condensed and forms dew. The water vapour which is being continually breathed out by plants also helps in the formation, for on a still night it is supposed that the amount of water deposited is more than could have condensed out of the air coming into contact with the leaves of the plants, and that the plant itself assists in the deposition of moisture on its leaves. Dew is deposited, not on plants alone, but on all objects that have become cooled by radiation. Plants radiate their heat more freely than other bodies, and so receive a greater proportion of moisture.

Dew falls freely in some parts. Where it seldom rains it falls heavily, and is nature's only means of preserving vegetation in these thirsty regions of the globe, thus providing every leaf with its allowance of moisture, night after night, enabling it to grow and flourish.

"In the South American forests," says Humboldt, "notwithstanding the sky is perfectly clear overhead, rain frequently falls in heavy showers, caused by the copious formation of dew by the radiating powers of the tops of the trees, in contact with the vapour-laden atmosphere of the tropics."[1]

2. Often in Scripture the dew, so much needed and so beneficent in its operation as it distils on the dry and thirsty ground, stands as the image of the Divine Spirit, and His quickening, refreshing influences as He works in the moral world, on the otherwise arid and barren hearts and lives of men. It is evidently thus that the figure is here employed. It is the living and life-giving Lord Himself who speaks. He speaks of His own purposed action. He says, This is what I personally and powerfully will do. I will come to the hitherto lifeless, useless, fruitless Israel, and affect him as does the dew when it falls on the

[1] W. Coles-Finch, *Water: Its Origin and Use*, 140.

parched and profitless earth, in the rainless, scorching days of summer, and transforms deadness and sterility into life and beauty and fertility.

God envelops His people as an atmosphere by which they are revived as with fresh dew from on high. No man hath seen Him at any time, yet it is His invisible power that quickens and sustains us all; it is not the things that we can touch, taste, or handle, but that God who is "through all, and in you all, and over all." As the air lies close to every living thing and enters into its being, so also does He; and the health and the joy of our souls depend on our receiving, in all its purity, that spiritual atmosphere which is the very breath of our life. But the special point suggested by the text is, that this God who is so near to us all brings with Him elements of tender refreshment, which are like dew to revive our hearts amid the wear and tear, the dust and weariness of existence.

¶ It is peculiarly true of the dew that it moistens everything where it falls; it leaves not one leaf unvisited; there is not a tiny blade of grass on which the diamond drops do not descend; every leaf and stem of the bush is burdened with the precious load. Just so it is peculiarly true of the Spirit, that there is not a faculty, there is not an affection, or power, or passion of the soul on which the Spirit does not descend, working through all, refreshing, reviving, renewing, re-creating all.[1]

¶ Sarah Smiley, in speaking of the preciousness of early communings with God, says: "It is one of the rarest exceptions when no dew falls in my garden, and perhaps it is nourished even more in this way than by the rains. As I go to my morning work among the flowers, the dew rests everywhere, often as heavily as though a shower had fallen—that is, everywhere that there is life to receive it; for I do not find the dew upon the garden paths, nor on any barren spot. But every leaf is laden and every flower is fresh from this baptism by the hand of God. And as I lightly stir the soil around my flowers, where it is becoming hard and impervious to air, these heavy dews contribute their small quota of rich refreshing to the soil itself." Then Sarah Smiley applies the spiritual lesson of the early dew, "Oh, blessed dew of the Spirit of God! How faithful and constant is Thy coming! How Thou visitest us in the still hours and in the hours of shadow! How dost Thou utter Thy wisdom almost inaudibly! We see no cloud, we hear no sound, and yet Thy

[1] R. M. McCheyne.

presence is with us and our souls are rejoicing. Thy love bathes our souls with delight. We bow down beneath its pressure in adoring gratitude. The fragrance of our souls goes forth to Thee as every pore of our being opens at this soft touch. We are alone with Thee, and Thou speakest to our hearts. Thou canst not come to us thus in the broad light of the busy day. We bless Thee for the still hours in which our souls are charged anew with life."[1]

3. The dew is a fit emblem of God. It is one of His own creations. Like all the works of His hand, it was made in the love of it, and in the joy of the mission on which He was to send it. It therefore pictured the heart which begat it. In itself it is a truth as to God. He needed but to say, "I will be as the dew," to tell us that He Himself would bless us, even as, in the dew, He blesses the plants. To slake our thirst, to feed our life, to touch us into loveliness, and to thrill us into fruitfulness, we need God Himself. No angel is mighty enough to undertake the task; no gift is of any avail. God does not therefore send: He comes: "I will be as the dew." The fitness of dew as an emblem of God may easily be seen.

(1) The appearance of the dew has always filled men with a sense of mystery. The dew neither rises nor falls. It neither comes down from heaven nor rises out of the earth; it is distilled from the air. As the sun sets, the air cools and deposits on the place of need the vapour it can no longer hold. The dew is thus ever at hand—hidden yet becoming more intimately manifest when evening falls. Both the Old Testament and New Testament assure us that God is not far from us—"He is very nigh thee." Wonderful is His appearing, as on some Emmaus road, when the heart is bruised and life is exhausted; in the gloaming of the day He comes to heal us.

> On the poor heart worn out with toil Thy Word
> Falls soft and gentle as the evening shower.

And yet how mild and familiar this wonderful economy of Nature has become, inspiring no dread, arousing no suspicion, creating no fear, but simply accepted as a gracious, providential arrangement that, despite the fact that it seems so incomprehen-

[1] F. E. Marsh, *Emblems of the Holy Spirit*, 200

sible, may be safely left to its close and constant contact with our earthly life! And God Himself, who does all these things, is not more easy of comprehension. Though, like the dew, He is in close and familiar contact with us, He is infinitely beyond the grasp of our understanding, and before His great and glorious attributes our penetration is baffled and our apprehension confounded. Everywhere we may discern the evidence of His existence and the manifestations of His glory; yet to mortal eye He is invisible, and we can nowhere discover the place where His honour dwelleth.

(2) The dew comes quietly. It has a great work to do, but it uses no force, makes no noise, shows no sign. Gardens, fields, forests are to be revived. Gems, with a secret of life in them, are to be laid into each uplifted hand of grass, and leaf, and spray. There is an infinitude of business, but no token of the worker. We witness the vast result, but not the operation. The whole meadow and mountain have been baptized into a fresh, pure life, but no one caught a glimpse of the finger from which the dewdrop fell; and the foot that bore the blessing has left no print.

When God comes to our soul, as to His field, He comes thus quietly. We hear no footfall; we feel no touch; we mark no motion of the miracle that is being done. We are born again; and we may note it, and remember it no more than in the case of our first birth. God's work on us is a secret with Himself. We recognize it only by its result. Our spirit is quickened: we are alive with the life of God. With eager faith we draw in the refreshing, strengthening truths which bathe our soul. In each of these, as the sun in a dewdrop, we see the shining Sun of heavenly love. We are glorious with a glory which is all the gift of God.

(3) There is power in the dew. "Only a dewdrop," we carelessly say—a thing of light and beauty, quivering in our sight for a little space with ephemeral radiance, and then lost in the sunbeam, scattered by an insect's flight, or wafted to destruction by a breath of morning air. Yes; but there is power in the dewdrop. It represents a force far transcending the potency of mechanical contrivance or dynamic agency—the force that gladdens the wilderness and the solitary place, and causes the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. For though it is only

a dewdrop it sparkles with the glory of a new creation, and hides within its jewelled bosom the freshening might that maketh all things new. And God will be as the dew unto Israel—uniting in Himself this gentleness and force, and in all the relations He sustains to us, giving to them glorious manifestation.

¶ There is more energy imprisoned in a drop of dew than is liberated by a thunderstorm.[1]

(4) The dew comes seasonably. It comes when it is needed, and when it can gain its end. The very existence of the dew indicates a loss sustained by Nature and a provision in Nature for repairing that loss. The absorbing effects of the sun's heat not only tell upon the earth in stimulating its demand for moisture, but they likewise produce those variations of temperature which ensure its supply. They cool the surface of the earth, on the one hand, and warm the volume of the atmosphere, on the other; and as the ambient air, laden with generous gifts, broods over the soil, where the springs of life have been drained and the energies of growth are flagging, it feels the cool touch of lips that plead for refreshing, and of faces upturned for benediction, and at once the pearly drops condense and gather that they may afford the fertilizing supply.

There are seasons in our religious experience when the chill of fear or of failure changes our spiritual state; seasons, too, in the Church, when the low and lifeless tone of its fellowship is a true index of its spiritual dearth. Life is not lost, but it has become torpid; and we need that energizing touch of Divine grace which our very benumbed condition provokes to quicken us.

¶ The principal seasons when a provision of the nature of dew is needed in the Holy Land, and when it is so abundantly given, are summer and autumn. Then six consecutive months of drought occur regularly, even under the most favourable circumstances. From about the first week in May to the middle of October, in the usual course, no drop of rain falls, and throughout the twelve hours of each day the sun shines with great strength, unveiled by a single cloud. In the autumn the thermometer has been known to register 118° Fahrenheit in the shade of the hot plains. In other words, the dew comes in just where and when it is most needed, adding greatly to its benefits by the timeliness of its coming.

I am glad to believe that this is in accordance with the modes

[1] Sir Michael Faraday.

of Divine working amongst the children of men. The souls who most need the Master's tender care are those whom He most seeks to bless. The moments of our life which are most barren of ordinary joys and blessings are those moments in which we may most securely depend upon the answering help of our Almighty Father. When the heart is parched by drought, and scorched by the sun; when the rain-laden clouds refuse to gather, or gather only to deceive our hopes; when the showers fall not, and we lie barren of hope and joy before God, then—even then, yes, especially then, will He come to us if we truly seek Him.[1]

II.

The Blessing of the Dew.

The prophet's familiarity with Nature, however, carried him a long way past the point of merely accepting the dew as a symbol of God's relationship to Israel. He knew that fertility was begotten of the dew. Where it was given it was natural to expect growth. The response of fields and vineyards to its productive presence was fruitfulness and plenty; and so, in a figure, the result is applied to Israel in this splendid picture of human responsiveness to God's gracious influence: "He shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon."

1. When God heals the backsliding of Israel, "he shall blossom as the lily." Long after this word was spoken by the lips of the prophet, Jesus walked our fields and pointed to the purple-crowned flower. He bade us see, in its curving petals and rich tints, the very perfection of beauty. No show that even Solomon could make, when decked in royal robes, was equal to the glory of the lily-bloom. But God's heart cannot rest there. To create and to behold even such exquisite loveliness is not enough. Soon the lily fades; and it dies, having had no joy in its own beauty, and no communion with its own Creator. God yearns for a deathless flower, whose grace shall ever grow under His smile, and whose heart shall understand and answer His.

[1] H. C. McCook, *The Gospel in Nature*, 38.

¶ The white Julienne was a special favourite with the unfortunate Marie Antoinette. She was shut up in the most loathsome apartment of the Conciergerie, and a soldier was stationed in a corner of the room to watch over her night and day. Madame Richard, a keeper of the prison, who pitied the poor queen, brought her every day bouquets of the flowers she loved, thus tempering the putrid miasmas of the place with sweet perfumes.[1]

2. As the result of God's presence, Israel "shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." This does not refer to the roots of that giant range that slope away down under the depths of the Mediterranean. That is a beautiful emblem, but it is not in line with the other images in the context. As these are all dependent on the promise of the dew, and represent different phases of the results of its fulfilment, it is natural to expect this much uniformity in their variety, that they shall all be drawn from plant life. If so, we must suppose a condensed metaphor here, and take "Lebanon" to mean the forests which another prophet calls "the glory of Lebanon." The characteristic tree in these, as we all know, was the cedar. It is named in Hebrew by a word which is connected with that for "strength." It stands as the very type and emblem of stability and vigour.

¶ Galilee is literally the casting forth of the roots of Lebanon. As the supports of a great oak run up above ground, so the gradual hills of Galilee rise from Esdraelon and Jordan and the Phoenician coast upon that tremendous northern mountain. It is not Lebanon, however, but the opposite range of Hermon, which dominates the view. Among his own roots Lebanon is out of sight; whereas that long glistening ridge, standing aloof, always brings the eye back to itself. In the heat of summer harvesters from every field lift their hearts to Hermon's snow; and heavy dews by night they call his gift. How closely Hermon was identified with Galilee, is seen from his association with the most characteristic of the Galilæan hills: Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Thy name.[2]

3. "His branches shall spread." The branches of the cedar are spreading branches, and their grateful shade makes welcome provision for rest, for shelter, and for social assembly. It is this

[1] J. N. Norton, *The King's Ferry Boat*, 136.
[2] G. A. Smith.

aspect of the cedar that makes it so worthy a type of friendliness and protection, and clothes it with the special attribute of genial sociability; and it is this characteristic in the human response to Divine impulse and blessing that needs special attention from Christian men and Christian Churches. The Christian life is a spreading life.

¶ One of the strange freaks of Japanese horticulture is the cultivation of dwarf trees. The Japanese grow forest giants in flowerpots. Some of these strange miniature trees are a century old, and are only two or three feet high. The gardener, instead of trying to get them to grow to their best, takes infinite pains to keep them little. His purpose is to grow dwarfs, not giant trees. From the time of their planting they are repressed, starved, crippled, stunted. When buds appear, they are nipped off. So the tree remains only a dwarf all its life.

Some Christian people seem to do the same thing with their lives. They do not allow themselves to grow. They rob themselves of spiritual nourishment, restrain the noble impulses of their nature, shut out of their hearts the power of the Holy Spirit, and are only dwarf Christians when they might be strong in Christ Jesus, with the abundant life which the Master wants all His followers to have.[1]

If there be some weaker one,
Give me strength to help him on;
If a blinder soul there be,
Let me guide him nearer Thee.
Make my mortal dreams come true
With the work I fain would do;
Clothe with life the weak intent,
Let me be the thing I meant;
Let me find in Thy employ
Peace that dearer is than joy;
Out of self to love be led,
And to heaven acclimated,
Until all things sweet and good
Seem my nature's habitude.[2]

4. "His beauty shall be as the olive tree." Anybody who has ever seen a grove of olives knows that their beauty is not such as strikes the eye. If it were not for the blue sky overhead that rays

[1] J. R. Miller, *Our New Edens*, 68.
[2] J. G. Whittier, *Andrew Rykman's Prayer*.

down glorifying light they would not be much to look at or talk about. The tree has a gnarled, grotesque trunk which divides into insignificant branches, bearing leaves mean in shape, harsh in texture, with a silvery underside. It gives but a quivering shade and has no massiveness or symmetry. Ay! but there are olives on the branches. And so the beauty of the humble tree is in what it grows for man's good. After all, it is the outcome in fruitfulness that is the main thing about us. God's meaning, in all His gifts of dew, and beauty, and purity, and strength, is that we should be of some use in the world.

The glory of the tree—with all its spreading boughs and glistening leaves—would have been but a poor boast, if it had been of no use. Its true majesty was the homelier glory of serving well the heaven that bathed it and the earth that bore it. Its "goodly" fruit yielded oil for the lamps in the house of God, and even for the sacrifices on the holy altar. It no less ministered in many ways to man. It was used for food and for medicine, and also for ointments to cheer and beautify.

¶ There is a story that when the foundations of what was afterwards the capital of Greece were laid a dispute arose between Neptune and Minerva as to which should have the honour of naming it. The council of the gods decided that it should be given to the one who bestowed the most useful gift. Thereupon Neptune, striking the ground angrily with his trident, produced a horse, but Minerva, copying his action and smiling with disdain, struck the earth with a spear and called forth an olive tree. That was agreed to be the more useful gift, and so Minerva gave the city one of her own names, Athena; hence we have Athens to-day.[1]

I know a nature like a tree;
Men seek its shade instinctively.
It is a choir for singing birds,
A covert for the flocks and herds.
It grows and grows, nor questions why,
But reaches up into the sky,
And stretches down into the soil,
Finding no trouble in its toil.
It flaunts no scar to tell of pain,
Self-healed its wounds have closed again
Unaided by its pensioners;

[1] T. Hind, *The Treasures of the Snow*, 66.

And yet I know that great heart stirs
To each appeal and claim, indeed
Leans to their lack and needs their need.[1]

5. "His smell as Lebanon." There is something very mysterious about perfume. No one can describe it. You cannot take a photograph of it. Yet it is a very essential quality of the flower. The same is true of that strange thing we call influence. Influence is the aroma of a life. The most important thing about our life is this subtle, imponderable, indefinable, mysterious element of our personality which is known as influence. This is really all of us that counts in our final impression on other lives.

Growth is to be felt as well as seen. Our advancement in the Divine life is not always proclaimed as the addition of cubits to a man's stature may be told, or by such tokens as are hailed as proofs of material increase. No; but by other media and through an appeal to other senses. For, just as in the palmy days of the Temple service at Jerusalem there were gorgeous ceremonies of worship that riveted the worshipper's eye and touched the worshipper's soul, while only the pungent sweetness of the frankincense, as it filled the courts of the sanctuary, could fix the blind man's attention and move his heart: so in the great service of life the precious fragrance of a holy walk and conversation will indicate the presence of a hidden sanctity, and tell of growth Godward and heavenward even more convincingly than any other evidence of which we can boast.

¶ Nature's forces carry their atmosphere. The sun gushes forth light unquenchable; coals throw off heat; violets are larger in influence than bulk; pomegranates and spices crowd the house with sweet odours. Man also has his atmosphere. He is a force-bearer and a force-producer. He journeys forward, exhaling influences. Scientists speak of the magnetic circle. Artists express the same idea by the halo of light emanating from the Divine head. Business men understand this principle; those skilled in promoting great enterprises bring the men to be impressed into a room and create an atmosphere around them. Had we tests fine enough we would doubtless find each man's personality the centre of outreaching influences. He himself may be utterly unconscious of this exhalation of moral forces, as he is of the contagion of disease from his body. But if light is in him,

[1] Alice W. Bailey.

he shines; if darkness rules, he shades; if his heart glows with love, he warms; if frozen with selfishness, he chills; if corrupt, he poisons; if pure-hearted, he cleanses. We watch with wonder the apparent flight of the sun through space, glowing upon dead planets, shortening winter and bringing summer, with birds, leaves, and fruits. But that is not half so wonderful as the passage of a human heart, glowing and sparkling with ten thousand effects, as it moves through life. Gentle as is the atmosphere about us, it presses with a weight of fourteen pounds to the square inch. No infant's hand feels its weight; no leaf of aspen or wing of bird detects this heavy pressure, for the fluid air presses equally in all directions. Just so gentle, yet so powerful, is the moral atmosphere of a good man as it presses upon and shapes his kind.[1]

¶ In his reply to the addresses of appreciation which were delivered at the meeting held to celebrate his seventieth birthday, Dr. Miller said: "My one purpose is to fill the years so full of humble, loving service that every birthday shall mark a year of complete consecration to the Master. I feel as Louis Kossuth said: 'I would like my life to resemble the dew, which falls so noiselessly through the night, and just as silently passes away, soon as the rays of the morning's sun beam upon the earth. Unnoticed by men's eyes, save for an occasional iridescent sparkle here and there upon some blade of grass, it is drawn upward and passes away—but all that it has touched is freshened and beautified by its silent yet potent presence.'"[2]

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May,
Although it fall and die that night,—
It was the plant and flower of Light.
In small proportions we just beauties see;
And in short measures life may perfect be.[3]

[1] N. D. Hillis, *The Investment of Influence*, 13.
[2] J. T. Faris, *Jesus and I are Friends: The Life of Dr. J. R. Miller*, 251.
[3] Ben Jonson

A Meeting with God.

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A Meeting with God.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.—Amos iv. 12.

1. The writings of the prophet Amos have a peculiar interest to the student of the Bible. They are the earliest extant Hebrew prophecy of any length upon the date of which scholars are agreed. But it is not to students alone that the writings are interesting. Amos himself was not a scholar. He was a shepherd and a fruit-dresser. He had not been educated among the sons of the prophets. He had been trained in the school of nature. Hence it is that his writings reflect more closely the life and thought of the nation to which he belonged, and have a deeper interest for the ordinary man than they would have had if they had been composed by a divine in his study.

2. The story from which the text is taken belongs to the reign of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, when the kingdom of Israel was at the height of its glory and its frontier extended beyond the farthest point reached in the brightest days of Solomon. This was a period of unexampled material prosperity for the Northern Kingdom. It was not a country of great natural resources in itself, but it lay on the main trading route between Assyria on the one hand and Egypt on the other. It was therefore rapidly growing wealthy, and had produced an order of great merchant princes. The immediate result of this increase of prosperous intercourse with foreign nations was an outburst of luxury and vice. As usual, the concentration of great wealth in the hands of a few tended towards the oppression of the many. The lot of the poor was intolerable owing to there being no justice in the land. Slavery grew rapidly; there were crowds of foreign slaves in the palaces of the nobles, while the freemen of Israel were being reduced to the position of serfs on the soil they had formerly owned. These palaces must have been enormous structures, replete with

everything that could minister to the senses. They were often built of marble and inlaid with ivory and gold. The women of the rich classes seem to have become demoralized and heartless. Religion was punctiliously attended to, but was almost completely divorced from morality. The priests accommodated themselves to the manners of the time, and taught that Jehovah was the God of Israel only, and that the national prosperity was a token of His favour. The worshippers believed that God was their God much in the same way as serfs believed in their feudal lord. It was His business to look after them and to secure to them material enjoyment and victory over their enemies; they, on their part, had to endow His sanctuaries and be careful to observe His feasts and sacrifices.

3. This, then, was the first thing Amos saw, that, although the land was full of religion, it was as full of iniquity, which, God being judge, could not go unpunished. In the next place he saw that the punishment was near. On the horizon was a cloud that would spread itself and overwhelm them—the great conquering empire of the Assyrians. Amos nowhere mentions the Assyrians by name, but the people knew whom he meant. That made the treason of his prophecy—to think that the kingdom could be overthrown; and that also made the blasphemy of it—to prophesy that Jehovah's people could fall before the heathen. The people knew quite as well as Amos that their land was in danger from the Assyrians, for it was through the Assyrian weakening of Damascus, with whom they had fought for years, that they had been able to extend their borders; and now that Damascus had fallen, nothing stood between them and the Assyrians. But for all that, they had no fear; they put their trust in the God of their fathers. By His stretched-out arm they had conquered the nations round about; the gods of the nations had fallen down before Jehovah. Who, compared with Him, was Baal or Moloch? Rimmon of Damascus had fallen; Chemosh had not saved Moab from His anger, nor Milcom the children of Ammon. And now that Asshur, the god of the Assyrians, was leading on his nation against them, it would be seen once more which of the two was the Lord of Hosts. And so they redoubled their sacrifices, and were confident of the issue.

4. And what had Amos to tell them about this impending struggle between Jehovah and Asshur? He told them that it was not Asshur but Jehovah who was leading the Assyrian army against them. We are so accustomed to the truth that God is the God of all flesh, that He has made of one blood all the nations of men, that we can hardly throw our imagination back to a time when this great fact was a new and startling revelation. But that is the truth Amos is labouring to impart to his countrymen —that although God had known them alone of all the nations, yet it was He who guided the blind movements of all the wandering peoples of the earth. "Jehovah, the God of hosts, is his name." Yes, the God of hosts—as the Israelites were so proud to call Him; but of what hosts? Not of the hosts of Israel merely; they were but as dust in the balance. And so, because it was not Asshur but Jehovah that was bringing up the Assyrian army against them, Amos bade the people prepare to meet Him. That sentence, "Prepare to meet thy God," which has almost lost power to arrest us from being placarded in waiting-rooms and stencilled on the pavement of our streets, had a terrible significance as it first comes into Scripture. It meant, The God of your nation is bringing up an army against His own people; when you prepare yourselves for battle, it will be to fight against your own God, who is advancing against you. "Prepare to meet *thy* God, O Israel."

¶ Lotze and those who side with him, though they are Monists inasmuch as they believe that there is only one substance in the Universe, viz., Spiritual Life and Energy, yet at the same time believe that the Eternal God, who by the partial differentiation of His own essential being calls into existence the world of nature and humanity, has also, while remaining immanent in all His creatures, given to these finite and dependent existences in progressive degrees a real selfhood; which selfhood culminates in that self-consciousness and moral freedom in man which enables him both to know and even to resist God. According to this view, God is immanent and active both in the inorganic and in the organic world; and in the latter He, without the animal's consciousness of the purpose, controls and directs its instinctive life. And when, as Prof. John Fiske has so well explained, physical evolution reaches its acme and the all-important and unending process of psychical evolution takes its place, then for the first time the Creator begins to take the creature into His intimate

confidence; and in man's rational, æsthetic, moral, and spiritual nature makes an immediate but progressive revelation of His own presence and His own character.[1]

I.

1. There is a voice within every one of us, if we will but let it speak, which says solemnly, sternly, "Prepare to meet thy God." If we hear not this voice now, we shall hear it hereafter; if not in the day of rude health, yet, unless the moral nerve has been cauterized, when we are sick or dying. Every man who believes that God exists, and that he himself has a soul which does not perish with the body, knows that a time must come when this meeting with God will be inevitable. At the hour of death, whether in mercy or in displeasure, God looks in the face of man, His creature, as never before. The veils of sense, which long have hidden His countenance, are then stripped away, and as spirit meets with spirit, without the interposition of any fibres of matter so does man in death meet with God. It is this that makes death so exceedingly solemn. Ere yet the last breath has fairly passed from the body, or the failing eyes have closed, the soul has partly entered upon a world altogether new, magnificent, awful. It has seen beings, shapes, modes of existence, never imagined before. But it has done more; it has met its God, as a disembodied spirit can meet Him. Surely, "Prepare—prepare for death!" is the voice of prudence. The one certain thing about life is that we must leave it. The one certain thing about death is that we must die. What will happen first, we know not. How much time will pass before our hour comes, we know not. What will be the manner of our death, violence or disease, an accident, or what we call natural causes, we know not. Where we shall die, at home or on a visit, in our beds or in the street, or in a railway train, or in a sinking steamboat,—this, too, we know not. Under what circumstances we shall die, in solitude or among friends, with the consolations of religion or without them, in spasms of agony or softly, as if we were going to sleep, we know not. The time, the place, the manner, the circumstances of death, are hidden from every one of us; but that which

[1] *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, ii. 411.

stands out from all this ignorance, in absolute, unassailable tragic certainty, is the fact itself that we must die, all and each of us. Scripture says, and experience echoes, "It is appointed."

¶ There is a light-hearted way of discounting death, and mocking the fear of it, which passes for courage, and is really mere slightness of intellect and poverty of conscience and imagination. The awfulness of death remains, felt by ineradicable instinct, and it was meant to remain. The subject may be called crude, harsh, morbid, if you like; but the winding-sheet, the coffin, and the six feet of earth are facts that wait for us. We may change the colour of its livery, but the fact we cannot change. It has been supposed to be a religious thing to meditate on death, and forecast its circumstances, and in this way religion has grown morbid. A well-known passage in Mr. Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* illustrates the morbidness without the religion. Thinking of her birthdays, "she suddenly thought one afternoon, when looking in the glass at her fairness, that there was yet another date, of more importance to her than those; that of her own death, when all these charms would have disappeared; a day which lay sly and unseen among all the other days of the year, giving no sign or sound when she actually passed over it; but not the less surely there. When was it? Why did she not feel the chill of each yearly encounter with such a cold relation?" The only use of such speculations is to force death back into the region of actual realities that we may reckon with it, and pass on to the true business of life. Lost in the mists of the future, the event of death seems uncertain and life eternal. Did we know the hour, life, foreshortened by the exact sight of the end, would shrink to a very small appearance though the limit were at five-score years.[1]

2. The text does not speak of to-morrow. Its cry, "Prepare!" has regard to the present. We are urged to the duty as a duty to be performed now. There is no "to-morrow" in the Christian's calendar, as assuredly there is none in the text's exhortation. There is perhaps no expression in our language that has done more mischief to more souls than "by-and-by." "Prepare to meet thy God!" "Time enough," says the youth; "wait till manhood comes." "Prepare to meet thy God!" "Time enough," says the man; "wait till age comes." "Prepare to

[1] John Kelman, *The Road*, i. 7.

meet thy God!" "Time enough," says age; "wait till death comes." And thus the present duty is constantly shifted off; the pleasures of youth hand the matter over to the business of manhood; the business of manhood bequeaths it to the infirmities of age; age takes up the accumulated legacy, and, with irresolute purpose, and feeble will, and exhausted strength, pushes it still nearer the grave, places it on the very confines of the eternal world, "resolves, and resolves, and dies the same."

¶ Whymper traces the stagnation of the South American Portuguese to their constant word "mañana" (to-morrow). It is an inseparable feature of genuine spiritual and moral truth that it demands earnestness, and presents a situation which is urgent and immediate.[1]

¶ It is said that when the late Prince Imperial was but a child he gained for himself the sobriquet of "Little Mr. Ten Minutes," owing to an inveterate habit he had acquired of pleading for ten minutes longer when asked to do anything. Whether it were the dinner hour, or time for sleep, the invariable ten minutes were demanded and usually granted. When in the morning he was called to rise, too sleepy to speak, he would hold up his hands with the ten fingers extended, signifying the desired delay. Who could have dreamed that the habit was one day to cost him his life? Yet so it was. Ten minutes in a soldier-guarded palace in France was one thing. Ten minutes in the face of an agile enemy in Zululand made just the difference between safety and death. And the heir-apparent to an imperial throne sacrificed all his prospects for an unchecked childish whim. Terrible must have been the anguish of the royal mother in realizing that her indulgence had sealed a fate which timely firmness might have averted![2]

¶ Browning's *Karshook* appeared in 1856 in *The Keepsake*; but, as we are told on good authority, has been printed in no edition or selection of the Poet's works. I am therefore justified in inserting it here—

> "Would a man 'scape the rod?"
> Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
> "See that he turn to God
> The day before his death."

[1] John Kelman, *The Road*, i. 75.

[2] F. de L. Booth-Tucker, *The Life of Catherine Booth*, ii. 103.

"Ay, could a man inquire
When it shall come!" I say,
The Rabbi's eye shoots fire—
"Then let him turn to-day!"[1]

3. What makes a death-bed terrible? The consciousness that there has been no preparation for it. What makes a death-bed happy? The consciousness of a lifelong preparation. Why did St. Paul cry, when death in no gentle form stared him in the face, "I am now ready to be offered"? Because he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Every day we are either fitting or unfitting ourselves for the final "meeting" with God our Maker. It behoves us to practise ourselves, to unlearn what we need to unlearn, making a right use of our time, doing our work well, availing ourselves of all our openings for amendment and improvement, living with a constant reference to the unseen, watching, praying, looking for the signals of the Master's coming. It is like preparing for an examination. We cannot recover the ground we have lost by making a tremendous effort to hurry up at the end; we cannot make up for past neglects by putting on a spurt at the last. The best preparation consists in giving constant attention to the regular daily lessons, to the steady plodding round of work, when as yet the examination is a long way off, and we do not feel the pressure of any immediate urgency. What should have been the slow result of years cannot be reached by any violent effort or sudden spring.

¶ Bossuet, the great poet of the tomb, says:

"It is not worthy of a Christian"—and I would add, of a man —"to postpone his struggle with death until the moment when it arrives to carry him off."

It were a salutary thing for each of us to work out his idea of death in the light of his days and the strength of his intelligence and stand by it. He would say to death:

"I know not who you are, or I would be your master; but, in days when my eyes saw clearer than to-day, I learnt what you were not: that is enough to prevent you from becoming mine."

He would thus bear, graven on his memory, a tried image against which the last agony would not prevail and from which

[1] Mrs. Sutherland Orr, *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 198.

the phantom-stricken eyes would draw fresh comfort. Instead of the terrible prayer of the dying, which is the prayer of the depths, he would say his own prayer, that of the peaks of his existence, where would be gathered, like angels of peace, the most lucid, the most rarefied thoughts of his life. Is not that the prayer of prayers! After all, what is a true and worthy prayer, if not the most ardent and disinterested effort to reach and grasp the unknown?[1]

II.

1. The words "Prepare to meet thy God!" taken in their general and not merely historical signification, are commonly used to warn men of the fact that they must meet God in the judgment to come. It is natural that the words should be applied in this manner. The reasonableness, one may say the necessity and the certainty, of such judgment can hardly be disputed by any who acknowledge the existence of a God, and the principle of man's responsibility to God. In this world neither vice nor virtue meets with its due reward; in many cases the worst men suffer least, and the best men most. It is to little purpose that dramatists, novelists, and poets so often represent retribution as falling upon the wrong-doer and vindicating the innocent. Such representations utter what we feel ought to be rather than what is. They are confounded and contradicted by the hard facts of history and of everyday life, which show that wrong is often triumphant to the last, and that the sinner is often spared, not only everything in the form of outward calamity, but also the uneasiness of a guilty conscience. The more we think of these wrongs that are never in this world rectified, the more does our moral sense cry out for a judgment to come.

Amos knew—as we Christians should know—that the ever-swelling tide of rebellion against the Ruler of the universe is, by a law which cannot fail to assert itself, bringing judgment nearer and nearer. It is not merely in the obedience of saints, in the conversion of sinners, in the extension of the Divine Kingdom, that we see the tokens of the approaching Advent; it is in the contemptuous rejection of the claims of God, it is in the resolute exclusion of the King of kings from large departments of human

[1] M. Maeterlinck, *Our Eternity*, 7.

thought and life; it is in the coarse blasphemies which meet the eye and the ear in our streets, but yet more in the refined ungodliness which underlies the graceful sentences of well-educated infidelity; it is in the placid indifference to God, as if He had had His day, and it were high time to forget Him.

¶ M. Renan says that a good deal of his gentleness is probably due to a bottom of indifference,—and, on the whole, I agree with him. Complacency with himself, a sentiment of kindliness to the world at large, a deeply-rooted horror of the selfishness of exclusive friendships, a vague feeling of gratitude to some one, "without exactly knowing to whom I ought to be grateful,"—this last naturally enough, as M. Renan is deeply convinced that there is no appreciable trace of the action of any Will in the world superior to that of man,—such is the stock of moral virtues of which M. Renan has made salvage, after the wreck of his faith. In fine, they do not leave me with any very deep respect for this smooth, humorous, learned, industrious, imaginative man, who has slipped so easily along the "charming promenade" of his extremely sentimental existence.[1]

2. Is there not something startling in the reflection that it is a Being of a perfect holiness and a most absolute justice who is to be our Judge? Who can uncover his heart even to a friend without a sense of shame? And yet what is the holiness of the holiest saint compared with the holiness of God? But add to the thought of God's holiness the idea of His omnipresence; think of Him as about our path and about our bed, no secret sin not set in the light of His countenance, no thought too transient to escape His notice, no desire veiled in the darkness of our inmost soul, but telegraphed at once upon His pure intelligence; and who will not be solemnized by the thought that his Creator must be his Judge?

Not only are our hearts awed; we are afraid to go near to God. Why is it so? Why is a child that has disobeyed his parent in his absence afraid of that parent's return at eventide? Why does he think the afternoon hours are posting very fast away? Why is a scholar who has committed some offence against rule afraid to meet the teacher's eye? Why is a servant who has been unfaithful to his master afraid to be called to give account of his stewardship? Why is a man hiding from the

[1] R. H. Hutton, *Criticisms on Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, i. 234.

officers of justice for some crime against the law ready to start at every knock which comes to the door of the house where he is staying? Why does a criminal in prison dread the bar, and the judge, and the assize-day? To all these questions the answer is the same. Sin leads in fear. It is this that makes us shrink from meeting the eye of God.

¶ A Hungarian king, being sad one day, was asked by his brother the reason of his heaviness of heart. "I have been a great sinner," said he, "and know not how to die, and appear before God in the judgment." His brother laughed at him. It was the custom in that country for the executioner to sound a trumpet before the door of the man who was to be executed. At midnight the trumpet sounded at the door of the king's brother. He arose and came in great haste to the king, and inquired in what he had offended. The king replied, "You have not offended me, but if the sight of my executioner be so dreadful, then shall I not, who have greatly offended, fear to stand in judgment before Christ?"[1]

3. Amos's prophetic call is accordingly not misapplied when directed to the final day of the Lord. Common sense teaches preparation for a certain future, and Amos's trumpet-note is deepened and re-echoed by Jesus. "Be ye ready also, for . . . the Son of man cometh." The conditions of meeting the Judge, and being "found of him in peace," are that we should be "without spot, and blameless"; and the conditions of being so spotless and uncensurable are what they were in Amos's day—repentance and trust. The words of the text bid us detach desire from unworthy and unsatisfying objects while yet we may. They bid us attach desire to the One Object which can everlastingly satisfy it; to the Being who made us, revealed in His Adorable Son. They bid us, while we may, wed desire to understanding; to that true understanding of the real meaning and conditions of our existence which God gives to those who would keep His law with their whole heart. Desire and understanding are the parents of will; will is but intelligent desire. And will is, or should be, the monarch among the faculties of the regenerate soul; shaping life in accordance with an apprehension of its true purpose; overcoming the obstacles which oppose themselves to

[1] C. W. Bibb, *Sharpened Arrows and Polished Stones*, 273.

the attainment of that purpose; bringing circumstances, habits, passions, even reasons, into harmonious co-operation for the attainment of the true end of man. "Prepare to meet thy God!" Yes! where will is supreme in a regenerate soul, soon "the crooked places are made straight, and the rough places plain," as of old across the desert for the passage of God. Everything is welcome, because everything, either as an assistance or as a discipline, must further our purpose—that of reaching the supreme object of desire, the Vision of God.

¶ It is not improper to explain the words of Amos in this sense—that though the people were almost past hope, he yet exhorted them to anticipate God's wrath. Prepare then thyself to meet thy God, as though he said, "However worthy thou art of being destroyed, and though the Lord seems to have closed up the door of mercy, and despair meets thee on every side, thou canst yet mitigate God's wrath, provided thou preparest to meet Him." But this preparation includes real renovation of the heart: it then takes place when men are displeased with themselves, when with a changed mind they submit to God, and humbly pray for forgiveness. There is then an important meaning in the Prophet's words, "Prepare thyself." With regard to meeting God, we know what Paul says in 1 Cor. ix., "If we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged by the Lord." How comes it, then, that God deals severely with us, except that we spare ourselves? Hence this indulgence, with which we flatter ourselves, provokes God's wrath against us. We cannot then meet God, except we become our own judges, and condemn our sins and feel real sorrow.[1]

¶ Repentance is not merely a change of conduct, but a change of conduct based upon a change of feeling and mind. It is a repudiation of what is now felt to be sinful. It is not enough to leave off doing wrong and begin to do right; there must be a sense of guilt, joined with sorrow for having done wrong in the past, and for being still tainted by inward evil. And in order that the repentance may be good, the motive for sorrow must be found not solely in the sinner's hopes or fears for himself, nor even in the thought of the injury he has inflicted upon his fellowmen; but in the knowledge that he has grieved and offended God. The determination to make what amends may be possible, and the readiness to acknowledge to God and (where advisable) to man the whole extent of the wrong done, must be the outcome of a loving and unselfish grief, which bears the name of contrition.

[1] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Minor Prophets*, ii. 244.

These, contrition, confession, amendment, are the three parts of repentance.[1]

III.

1. But the text in its original setting bears no reference to death and judgment after death; it is simply a warning of the destruction that was about to befall the kingdom of Israel. It is only natural that words so striking and so solemn should impress themselves upon the mind and conscience of every one who reads them, and that each should take them as a message from God to himself. And so, when men read this text in the Bible, or hear it preached upon in the pulpit, it is to death and judgment, to the meeting with their God there, that their thoughts are generally directed. They suppose that the preparation commanded by these words, "Prepare to meet thy God," is preparation for that. But this reading of the verse, while not in itself incorrect, often leads to mistakes. "I shall have to meet my God there after death; but death is still a great way off, and I need not now prepare." And so men quietly live on unprepared, and knowing that they are unprepared, presuming upon the chance of continued life, intending, when once they have reason to believe that their end is near,—intending then to prepare. They may be suddenly cut off without a moment's preparation; the pains and anxieties of sickness may render them incapable of preparation. It is generally to very little purpose that men in the hour of death prepare to meet their God, when they have not in life prepared to meet Him. This is far from saying that such death-bed preparation is never sincere, or never accepted of God, but one must own that it is incapable of proof and verification. Surely preparation to meet our God is too serious and important a matter to be risked upon the thousand chances of our last hours and our capacity in those hours to make any preparation whatever. The fact is, that men make a great and miserable mistake in supposing that the only meeting with God for which they are to prepare, and indeed the only meeting with God that is possible, is that compulsory meeting with Him in the day of judgment.

[1] A. J. Mason, *The Faith of the Gospel*.

2. In a manner sometimes unscriptural, God is frequently represented as at a great distance, seated on a throne in the highest heavens, entirely separate and apart from us now, but proposing at some future time to come and arraign us before His bar, that we may give account of ourselves to Him, and that our only meeting with Him will be on that occasion. Now let us remember God's omnipresence. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Instead of having to meet God only at the day of judgment, we meet Him every day, or at any rate He meets us. Remember the words of Jesus: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And again: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Thus to meet with God is not the terror of the future; it is the privilege, the blessing, of the present. A Christian can say with truth and with thankfulness, "I meet my God every day of my life; in prayer I speak to Him as a man speaketh to his friend. To me He is not a God afar off, whom some day I meet in judgment; He is near me, He holds me by the hand, and leads me. No one is so near to me as He, so constantly with me as He. You need not tell me to prepare to meet Him. I met with Him long ago, and have been with Him ever since; and, meeting Him here so much as my Friend, I am perfectly prepared to meet Him hereafter as my Judge. I know that I have often sinned. But when I met with Him He convinced me of my sin, but also convinced me of His willingness to forgive it, and impressed upon my mind the glorious truth, that His dear Son died to make atonement for my sin, and to make peace for me with Him. And so I asked Him to forgive me for Christ's sake; I asked Him to receive me as His child; I asked Him to remain with me to guide and help me. And He heard my prayer."

¶ The text of Bishop Lightfoot's enthronement sermon was "And they shall see his face." The prayer which from the first he asked his Diocese to offer for him was—

"That the Eternal Presence, thus haunting him night and day,

may rebuke, may deter, may guide, may strengthen, may comfort, may illumine, may consecrate and subdue the feeble and wayward impulses of his own heart to God's holy will and purpose!"

The "consciousness of an Eternal Presence"—that was the principle of his life. That made him strong; that made him sympathetic; that gave him absolute singleness of aim and simplicity of life; that filled him with a buoyant optimism which expressed itself in constant joyousness; that was the source of an almost unparalleled generosity which in life gave to God and the Church every gift which God gave him, and at death made his chaplains his executors, and his Diocese his residuary legatee; that was the strength which nerved the mind to think and the hand to write in the solitary room before the hard day of public life began and after it ended; that was the wondrous power of personality which made itself felt in Cambridge, in London, in Durham, by men of every degree. He was ever conscious of the Eternal Presence. He ever went to men from God, and the human presence was illumined by the Divine.[1]

3. God has ordained prayer as the means whereby we may meet with Him. "To this man will I look, and with him will I dwell, even with him who is of a humble and of a contrite spirit." The first sacrifice to bring to God is the sacrifice of a broken heart, the frank and full confession of utter sinfulness and worthlessness. And to this confession we must add the prayer that, for Christ's sake, we may be forgiven. And we must ask for the inclination and the power to forsake sin, and to live a holy life. And then it is necessary to keep up this communion with God; to meet Him in prayer day by day; to go to Him in prayer with every temptation, every difficulty, every sorrow, every duty, and every sin. So meeting with Him, such Divine companionship of thought, and feeling, and will, and purpose will be an infinite blessing; it will keep us out of sin, it will render us joyful all our days, it will give us a confidence in Him which nothing can disturb. Meeting with God, and walking with God, our whole character will be ennobled; and beholding so constantly the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

So, meeting God in life, we need have no anxiety about meeting Him after death. Having met with Him and walked

[1] *Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1893, p. 103.

with Him; having been, through repentance and faith, forgiven and justified; having, through fellowship with His Spirit, been sanctified, having so lived on earth as to please Him, we can meet Him in the judgment with assurance and joy. We shall meet with Him then to know Him better than we can know Him now; we shall meet Him, so changed by a glorious resurrection as to be able to see Him; we shall meet Him prepared for whatever service He may ordain for us in His perfected Kingdom, for we shall have so learned to serve Him here as to serve Him better hereafter. There is no other way of preparing to meet our God than this,—repentance, faith, obedience—the preparation that results from a personal knowledge of God, in a life consecrated to His service, and lived in the consciousness of His presence, and in the desire to please Him.

¶ The day following Erskine's death, Dr. John Brown, who attended him, wrote: "Our dear sweet-hearted friend is away. He died very gently last night at a quarter to ten; laid his pathetic weary head on the pillow like a child, and his last words were, 'Lord Jesus.'" As might have been anticipated, the scene beheld at his death-bed was as heavenly as his life had been. His nephew, who was present, declared that if many loved him for his life, more would have loved him in his death. And thus, to quote Dr. Hanna's beautiful words, "few have ever passed away from among their fellows, of whom so large a number of those who knew him best, and were most competent to judge, would have said as they did of Mr. Erskine, that he was the best, the holiest man they ever knew—the man most human, yet most divine, with least of the stains of earth, with most of the spirit of heaven."[1]

¶ It is evident there is a genius of holiness just as there is a genius in music or in mathematics. But it is not enough to say that. When we speak of genius here, what do we mean? At bottom it is a greater receptivity. The vision of the unseen; the conception of a higher life that controls the lower one; the love of the Highest and the Holiest which these souls display does not mean that the saints are in possession of treasures denied to other men. The grace of which they partake is a common grace. The spiritual power they touch is a power which is around us all, waiting for entrance. What separates them from the rest of us is a finer faculty for discerning this, a thinner barrier for the obstruction of its inflow. All they know and feel is objectively

[1] H. F. Henderson, *Erskine of Linlathen*, 136.

there, the common property of the race. We must wait for their vision till we have reached their level.[1]

One feast, of holy days the crest,
I, though no Churchman, love to keep,
All-Saints,—the unknown good that rest
In God's still memory folded deep;
The bravely dumb that did their deed,
And scorned to blot it with a name,
Men of the plain heroic breed,
That loved Heaven's silence more than fame.

Such lived not in the past alone,
But thread to-day the unheeding street,
And stairs to Sin and Famine known
Sing with the welcome of their feet;
The den they enter grows a shrine,
The grimy sash an oriel burns,
Their cup of water warms like wine,
Their speech is filled from heavenly urns.

About their brows to me appears
An aureole traced in tenderest light,
The rainbow-gleam of smiles through tears
In dying eyes, by them made bright,
Of souls that shivered on the edge
Of that chill ford repassed no more,
And in their mercy felt the pledge
And sweetness of the farther shore.[2]

[1] J. Brierley, *The Secret of Living*, 126.
[2] J. R. Lowell, *Under the Willows and Other Poems*.

The Wideness of God's Mercy.

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The Wideness of God's Mercy.

And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?—Jon. iv. 10, 11.

1. Jonah was the typical representative of a proud and exclusive nation. It was expected of Israel as the chosen people of God, to whom were committed the oracles of God, that they would be zealous in the cause of true religion, and spread its light and truth among those sitting in the darkness of heathenism. Their election and preparation for this high and noble mission had, however, a totally different effect upon themselves from that designed by God. It made them proud, arrogant, and exclusive, very unwilling to spread among the heathen the Divine truth lodged with them; at all events, at the time the Book of Jonah was written they were so. They considered themselves the favoured of Heaven, and as such possessing the exclusive right of enjoying Divine truth, whilst the Gentiles might live in the darkness of heathenism, and perish in it. If compelled to preach to them, they would be much more willing to announce God's judgment upon them than His mercy and compassion. It is indeed true that the prophets have always been enthusiastic about the near or distant future, when the Gentiles would be made partakers of the same privileges and blessings as were enjoyed by the Jews, but the Jewish nation as a whole was always reluctant to entertain such liberal and humane ideas.

2. The Book of Jonah is meant to illustrate by an historical narrative, embellished no doubt to suit the taste of the time, the great and important truth that God is no respecter of persons, and that in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh

righteousness is acceptable to Him. These bigoted and narrow-minded Jews had to be taught the humiliating lesson that the Gentiles were more ready and willing to accept the truth of God when preached to them than they themselves were. The repenting Gentiles saved, whilst the unmerciful Jews are reproved; the conversion of the Gentiles preceding the conversion of the Jews; the Gentiles rejoicing in the forgiving mercy of God, whilst the Jews are protesting, murmuring, and complaining that the promises of God have not been fulfilled in exactly the same manner as they have desired they should be—these are some of the leading principles this peculiar Book of Jonah is meant to set forth.

3. Jonah is the typical narrow and exclusive Jew; and the whole story of his narrowness and exclusiveness serves to throw into relief the wide and tender mercy of God. Than the text there is no more Christian utterance in the Old Testament. It raises the eternal protest that God is no less pitiful, but more pitiful, than we; that the pang of pity which a man feels for the withering of a flower or the autumnal fall of the leaf is felt a hundredfold in the heart of the Most High for the souls whom He has made in His image, and for whose growth in grace He has laboured and will labour.

¶ I have read the Book of Jonah at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow, for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvellous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without tears rising to my eyes, or my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, "Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."[1]

I.

Jonah's Hard Exclusiveness.

1. At the court of Jeroboam the Second, Jonah prophesied success against Syria, and his prediction was fulfilled, for Jeroboam

[1] C. H. Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, 170.

recovered Damascus and Hamath and restored the borders of Israel. The word of God now came to Jonah to go against the great city of Nineveh and pronounce its doom, unless it repented of its sins. The prophet was in an evil case. His patriotism forbade him to reach out a hand or foot to serve that great nation which would one day swallow up his own people, while his fear of God was a strong motive in his breast to obey. Before his eyes passed a vision of the time when the armies of Asshur and the fierce warriors of Chaldæa would swoop down from the northern plains upon that little nation and carry them away captive, planting the deserted villages and lands of Samaria with the people of Arva and Cutha and Sippara. These strange people with their strange gods would hold their riots in the halls that were once blest, while the Hebrews would be placed in Halah and Habor, cities by the river Gozan, separated from all they held dear, and surrounded by a proud idolatrous race. Such a nightmare hovered over Jonah, and compelled him to fly far from his homeland. In Balaam we have the case of a prophet who wished to carry a message contrary to the will of God. Here we have the instance of a prophet who wished to avoid performing a duty the Lord had laid upon him. In the long run, conscience proved stronger than fear or patriotism. But the battle was fiercely contested and protracted within the prophet's soul. Loth to convey a message that might prove the salvation of his national foes, he took ship for Tarshish, a port in Spain, with Phœnician merchants. But his purpose was frustrated by the storm, and he was cast into the waters, and then from the depths of Sheol he cried with a bitter cry to Jehovah to save him from his peril. The Lord had mercy upon him, and, after an experience which we need not discuss now, he was cast out upon the shore. There, as he lay helpless on the beach, the word of the Lord came to him and bade him hasten to Nineveh and deliver his message.

The original opportunity indeed was now gone. The prophet had lost the honour of at once obeying the Divine commands; he had tasted the agony implied in preferring his own inclinations to the will of God. But God had brought good out of evil, had taught him the beauty of repentance and the greatness of His mercy. And, surest proof of all that he was quite forgiven, the Divine Spirit had come back, the great impulse arose, which

formerly he had fought against and beaten down, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it." With a heart purified by repentance and softened by pardon, Jonah was now able to enter into the mind of God, to comprehend the feelings with which He looked down on a vast community of human beings who had forgotten His name and His nature. He himself had experienced the unfathomable pity that was in the Divine heart, God's earnest desire to show mercy, His unwillingness that any should perish. He had discovered that the heathen were not necessarily destitute of every human virtue, and that they were not completely averse to the worship of the true God. So wonderful indeed are God's ways of dealing with the hearts of men that Jonah was probably a fitter messenger to Nineveh after his attempted flight than he had been before. By our very failures, God educates us to do His will.

¶ It seems hard that we should often be left to exert ourselves for things that fail—that even with the best intentions we do things which turn to harm, and leave us to self-reproach. But let us ask ourselves how we could construct a moral world otherwise than by concealing results. And what again if successful results were always to reward sincere effort? Would not this be antedating the judgment? The failure may be a success as a part of our training, and not so great a failure in its direct object as it seems. When our aim has been pure, we may save ourselves self-reproach, while we gather wisdom in the use of means. There is always responsibility in action, but responsibility also in inaction. The one *may* be unsuccessful, the other *must*.[1]

2. But the evil spirit was not yet exorcised from Jonah's heart. When the Ninevites took him at his word and repented, and God spared them, he was bitterly disappointed. In the depth of his heart there lurked all along the secret hope that either they would not repent or repentance would come too late, and that in any case he would have the pleasure of seeing the great city destroyed. Was this feeling an unnatural one? We can hardly say so when we consider the past history of religion, and the feelings which have filled the hearts of undoubtedly religious men. We know that religious zeal has often been accompanied by atrocious cruelty, and that men have burned one another

[1] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 216.

for the love of God. There was nothing wonderful in the fact that a Hebrew prophet should desire that a Divine judgment should fall on a heathen city, and that Jehovah should be magnified in His mighty power. It was accordingly with very human, but by no means creditable, feelings of vexation and anger that Jonah saw that Nineveh was not to be destroyed after all. There was but little excuse for him. He had had a large experience of God's methods of working; he knew what God in His inmost nature was; and it is almost unaccountable that he should thus set himself in opposition to the Divine will, should grumble at God's goodness to his fellow-creatures, and should in effect tell Him that He had done wrong.

And yet how full and how complete was Jonah's knowledge of the character of God. "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil." Surely this was a knowledge fitted rather to send a tide of joy surging through a human heart, to make a man happy all his life. Yet, strangely enough, it was this very thought that roused such bitter feelings in Jonah's mind, and made him wish rather to die than to live—a proof, if proof were needed, that when we think that we are most religious, our feelings may be by no means in accordance with the mind of God. Knowledge of God's nature is one thing, sympathy with it is another. To have such sympathy we must drink in largely of the Divine Spirit.

¶ As the end drew near, Romanes began to make notes for a work which he meant to serve as a correction of the teaching of his book, *A Candid Examination of Theism*. As the notes grew, his faith came. The process of reviewing his past, the looking back on the way by which he had come, not only gave to him a truer view of the proportion of things, but also brought to him, first, the consciousness of God, and then that momentous experience in religious life—the kindling of the soul with the realized love of God. After his death, the notes were published, with the title, *Thoughts on Religion*. Bishop Gore thus describes the main position which is set forth in the book:

"Scientific ratiocination cannot find adequate ground for belief in God. But the pure Agnostic must recognize that God may have revealed Himself by other means than that of ratiocination. As religion is for the whole man, so all human faculties may be required to seek after God and find Him—emotions and

experiences of an extra 'rational' kind. The 'pure Agnostic' must be prepared to welcome evidence of all sorts."

Romanes takes the positive side of the evidence for faith in God as shown by "the happiness of religious, and chiefly of the highest religious—*i.e.* Christian—belief. It is a matter of fact that, besides being most intense, it is most enduring, growing, and never staled by custom. In short, according to the universal testimony of those who have it, it differs from all other happiness, not only in degree, but in kind. Those who have it can usually testify what they used to be without it. It has no relation to intellectual status. It is a thing by itself and supreme."[1]

3. Notice the peculiar impiety of Jonah's words: "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." This is the language of petulance. A man's worth may be measured by the reverence he has for his life. It is well for us to be aware of the real impiety that lurks under a longing for death and weariness of the life which, day by day, God is bestowing on us here. The gospel which delivers us from a coward fear of dying was never intended to foster an equally coward fear of living.

> My own dim life should teach me this,
> That life shall live for evermore.

He who brought immortality to light through the gospel, brought also life to light. He claimed for God this daily being, wherein men toil and sorrow and are disappointed, and filled it with a spirit and a purpose, a presence and a power, that make it sacred as any after-life can be. To despise this high gift of God,—to set it in the balance against disappointments, or labours, or unwelcome duties, and the common daily demands; because of sadness or weariness, to stretch out hopeless hands, and long for death—this is not only the mark of a coward spirit, it is also dark impiety. Such a scorn of God's rich blessedness is scorn of God Himself.

¶ "To live," says Sir Thomas Browne, "to live, indeed, is to be ourselves; which being not only a hope, but an evidence, in noble believers, 'tis all one to lie in St. Innocent's churchyard as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the Moles of Adrianus." "Ready

[1] H. Lewis, *Modern Rationalism*, 374.

to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever,"—they are noble words, and breathe the very spirit of the Bible. "With thee is the fountain of life," says the Psalmist in highest adoration of God. Christ, in claiming for Himself that He is one with the Father, speaks of the life that is in Him, and which He has power to give, as the proof of this. "As the Father raiseth up the dead, and giveth life to them; even so the Son giveth life to whom he will. As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself . . . because he is the Son of man."[1]

4. No man is so angry as the man who is in the wrong. The angry prophet, leaving Nineveh still undestroyed, betakes himself to the low hills lying to the east of the city. He is half of opinion yet that God's purpose of destruction is merely delayed, not altered. He will wait and see if the fiery shower will not still descend, and Nineveh become another Sodom. To shelter himself from the noonday sun, he makes a booth of twigs and foliage, and, sitting down, awaits the development of the Divine purposes.

Here in this bower he sits and anxiously longs for news respecting the destiny of the city and its inhabitants. He is exceedingly pleased with the comfort and protection this shady retreat affords him. May fire and brimstone destroy both the city and its inhabitants, as long as he is out of the reach of the destructive elements and can sit in his cool and shady bower undisturbed! He is prepared even to wait a little longer than he could have wished, for the rising of the smoke and flames of the burning city, and for the hearing of the cries and groans of its suffering inhabitants. He would have enjoyed nothing so much as to witness the effect of God's wrath upon the Ninevites. But the heartless man is not allowed to remain long undisturbed in his comfortable self-complacency. Hardly has he begun to realize the luxury of his bower, when the very gourd, which has contributed so largely to his comfort, withers away, and at a time when its shelter is most needed. Then in the morning, as the sun rose and shed its scorching rays on the unprotected head of Jonah, he fainted and wished that he would die, saying, "It is better for me to die than to live."

¶ In this impatience of life as well as in some subsequent traits, the story of Jonah reflects that of Elijah. But the

[1] A. Mackennal, *Christ's Healing Touch*, 92.

difference between the two prophets was this, that while Elijah was very jealous *for* Jehovah, Jonah was very jealous *of* Him. Jonah could not bear to see the love promised to Israel alone, and cherished by her, bestowed equally upon her heathen oppressors. And he behaved after the manner of jealousy and of the heart that thinks itself insulted. He withdrew, and sulked in solitude, and would take no responsibility nor interest in his work. Such men are best treated by a caustic gentleness, a little humour, a little rallying, a leaving to nature, and a taking unawares in their own confessed prejudices. All these—I dare to think even the humour—are present in God's treatment of Jonah. This is very natural and very beautiful. Twice the Divine Voice speaks with the soft sarcasm: *Art thou very angry?* Then Jonah's affections, turned from man and God, are allowed their course with a bit of nature, the fresh and green companion of his solitude; and then when all his pity for this has been roused by its destruction, that very pity is employed to awaken his sympathy with God's compassion for the great city, and he is shown how he has denied to God the same natural affection which he confesses to be so strong in himself.[1]

¶ Whole sheets have been filled with the discussion as to what the *kikayon*, the Gourd, mentioned in the Old Testament only in Jonah was. The dispute is an old one, for when St. Jerome translated it Ivy, St. Augustine was so offended with the translation that he denounced it as heresy. The most popular rendering has been that which identified the *kikayon* with the Arabic *El keroa*, the Castor-oil (*Ricinus communis*). The *Ricinus* is a large shrub rather than a tree, and has large palmate leaves with serrated lobes, and spikes of blossom which produce the seed, from whence the well-known medicinal oil is extracted in small rough husks. It is wild in all Oriental countries, but it is not a tree used for shade, being of a straggling growth, though of course any one might find shelter from the sun under its large foliage. Generally, however, it would be useless for the purpose. It reaches a considerable size—twelve or fifteen feet in height in the warmer parts of Palestine.

The etymological argument in favour of the *Ricinus* is, no doubt, strong, but practical reasons cause me to lean strongly to the rendering of our English version, Gourd—*i.e.*, the Bottle-Gourd (*Cucurbita pepo*). The Gourd is very commonly employed in Palestine for the purpose of shading arbours. Its rapid growth and large leaves render it admirably adapted for training on trellis work. In the warmer parts of America also, it is the favourite plant

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 539.

for shading arbours; and so rapid is its growth that it will often shoot a foot in a day. In the gardens about Sidon many an arbour of gourds may be seen. But the plant withers as rapidly as it shoots, and after a storm or any injury to the stem, its fruit may be seen hanging from the leafless tendrils which so lately concealed it, a type of melancholy desolation.

Now, we are expressly told in the history that Jonah "made him a booth," and that after it was made God prepared the "*kikayon*" to cover it. This is exactly the office of the Gourd. Jonah had erected his fragile lodge of boughs, whose leaves would rapidly wither, and a further shade would be required. Then the tendrils of the Gourd would seize the boughs and provide shelter for the prophet. But no one who knows the *Ricinus* can conceive it affording any shelter over an existing arbour, nor has it the qualities of rapid growth and sudden decay so characteristic of the Gourd.[1]

Within my garden was a flower
More fair than earth could know.
My heart upon it, hour by hour,
Did tender care bestow;
It opened wide to morning's light;
It closed at evenfall.
And, every day more fair and bright,
My flower was all in all.

The flower within my garden grew,
Than all my flowers more fair,
And, when my love it sweetly drew,
Became my only care;
While garden ways with weeds were wild,
And flowers neglected died,
Above my cherished bloom I smiled
And all the rest denied.

A morning came with bitter blight,
A morn with tears made wild—
My flower had perished in the night,
My heart had lost its child.
But when my eyes were washed by tears
And looked upon the light,
I gazed across the blinded years
And set my garden right.[2]

[1] H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible*, 449.
[2] James Strang, *Sunlight and Shadow*.

II.

God's Wide Mercy.

1. The question of the text is an argument which is often used in the Bible. It is an argument from man to God, from pity in man to pity in God; from the best in man to an unimaginably better in God. "Thou hast had pity: and should not I have pity?" Will religious men with their narrowness and selfishness keep God from being pitiful as He sees best? Our Lord makes use of this argument in the Gospels: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Erring men can be trusted to give what is good; how much more can God be trusted to give us what is best—even His Spirit in our hearts? The best in man is only a faint image of the best in God. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.

¶ "Thou hast pity on the gourd." At first sight the argument does not seem quite in order. For Jonah was not angry for the gourd's sake, but for his own, and indeed his feelings were not those of compassion, but of wrath. The word "pity" is applied by the author to Jonah and the gourd, because it is the true and appropriate word for God and the Ninevites. The parallelism is a little forced, but it is quite possible, as Professor Driver has had the great kindness to suggest to me in a private letter, that a sort of *a fortiori* argument was *intended* by the author. Jonah is allowed by God to have felt some pity for the gourd, although that pity was born of selfishness. He regretted its loss for its own sake as well as for himself. Now not only were the Ninevites incomparably more worthy to be spared than the gourd, but God was incomparably more ready to feel pity than Jonah; for not only was He their Creator and Sustainer, but pity in His case is an ever-present attitude of His nature, neither evoked by selfish considerations of personal advantage, nor assumed as the fair-seeming counterfeit of personal annoyance. God, the shepherd of man, is, as Plato would say, a true shepherd. His end or aim is the well-being of His flock, and only that. Nor does it matter to Him whether the sheep are light or dark, Aryan or Semitic.[1]

[1] C. G. Montefiore, *The Bible for Home Reading*, ii. 415.

2. But the text has a further contrast. It is an argument, not merely from man to God, but from the gourd to men, or rather to the young children and the cattle. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd; and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" Here again the argument is repeated in the Gospels. Our Lord was found fault with by narrow bigots for healing a man on the Sabbath. He reminded them that they would rescue a sheep from a pit on the Sabbath because it was their property. "How much, then," He asked, "is a man of more value than a sheep?" The text makes the noble claim that God cares for the dumb, driven cattle. But its main argument is, "How much is a child of more value than a gourd?" Men and women are more to God than the short-lived shrub to the sun-beaten and sulky prophet. As we sometimes sing in Ebenezer Elliott's Hymn of the People—

> Flowers of Thy heart, O God, are they,
> Let them not pass, like weeds, away.

¶ In poor cottages, looking so destitute one hardly likes to enter them, women nurse flowers calling them "pets" and "beauties," and cherishing them as gently as though the flowers could smile on them, and repay them for their care. These women know what it is to love the plants; and many a one is bound by this tenderness to a world of men and women which else she might regard with selfish, bitter scorn. The "little ewe lamb," says Nathan, the prophet, that the poor man had, "lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter." Over the wretched, gloomy Jonah, sprung up the wondrous plant, and its leaves and tendrils drew off his thoughts from himself; and as he watched it grow, a new interest was awakened in him. His heart softened to the plant; and the man who, a little before, despised his own life and scorned all Nineveh, becomes strangely tender and reverential over a gourd. There is something wonderful in life, even though it be the life of a common weed. Such things speak to us, however faintly we may understand them, of an awful power that forms, and an ever watchful care that tends them: they are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Around us are manifold influences to wean us from perverse melancholy, and draw us out of ourselves. Jonah loves his gourd, and "has pity" on it when it is smitten.[1]

[1] A. Mackennal, *Christ's Healing Touch*, 96.

3. Notice the exceeding gentleness with which God reproves and seeks to restore the angry prophet. He does not follow him again with terrors, as when He pursued him with shipwreck, and caused the depths to close around him, and wrapped his head about with weeds, and barred the earth about him, and made his soul to faint within him. The disobedient are constrained by a force too strong for them; but even the ungracious doing of duty brings the spirit into fitness for gentler discipline. The Lord cares for Jonah in his self-will: He "prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd." And when He smites the gourd, and sends the vehement east wind and burning sun to beat on Jonah's head, it is that He may speak in words gentler than the gourd-shade, and reveal Himself to the stricken spirit as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." How different is this from man! We should have said, "Let Jonah experience to the full the barrenness and bitterness he has brought upon himself; let the life he scorns be taken from him." So we speak, repaying scorn with scorn, glad that the self-absorbed man is his own tormentor. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

¶ What is the Divine gospel which, through this Book of Jonah, is revealed to us? In a word it is this: that God cares for the sinners of Nineveh as well as for the saints of Jerusalem; that little children and even dumb cattle are dear to Him; that His tender mercies are over all His works. Where in all the Old Testament is there so moving a parable of the love of God? Is not this the very tone and temper of Jesus Himself? "Out there, beyond the Covenant, in the great world lying in darkness"—this was the truth our author told into the prejudiced faces of his people—"there live, not beings created for ignorance and hostility to God, elect for destruction, but men with consciences and hearts, able to turn at His Word, and to hope in His Mercy—that to the farthest ends of the world, and even in the high places of unrighteousness, Word and Mercy work just as they do within the Covenant." And so this little book, which to some of us, perhaps, has seemed little more than a strange fairy-tale, or a riddle of which we had lost the key, "opens out," in the words of Mr. R. C. Gillie, "like an exquisite rose till we find in the heart of it the glowing crimson of the love of God."[1]

[1] G. Jackson, *Studies in the Old Testament*, 154.

4. But there is an implied argument, which takes us deeper into the heart of God. The prophet pitied the gourd because it had been useful to him, giving him shelter from the fierce Eastern sun. But the gourd was not of his making; he had not spent labour of heart and brain upon its growth. God has a far closer relation to men than the prophet had to the gourd, "for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow." God has done all that for men; He has laboured for them and made them grow. God is our Maker. That is an elementary thought of God, but the author of the Book of Jonah discovers a gospel in it. There are other names for God, richer, perhaps, more endearing—Shepherd, Father, Saviour. But here is the ground-fact of religion —God our Maker. The Hundredth Psalm says joyously, "It is he that hath made us, and we are his." These words are the ground of God's claim on us, and we may reverently add that they are the ground of our claim on God. It is part of Job's pathetic appeal out of his agony of loss and pain, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me." Every man loves, to some extent, the thing he has made, which has taken something of himself into it, which he has watched with keen interest as it slowly arose to the fulness of its being. How much more must God love the souls whom He has made in His image, capable of unravelling and following His thoughts in the courses of the stars, and all the vast interplay of Nature's forces, capable of reaching out to Him in love and aspiration after the highest. How beautifully and truly is it said in the Wisdom of Solomon, "Thou lovest all things that are, and abhorrest none of the things which thou didst make; for never wouldest thou have formed anything if thou didst hate it"! The fact that God has made us is a proof that He loves us. Creation is full of the loving joy of the Creator in His works.

The perennial miracle of love is this, that it increases in the ratio of the expenditure of our pains, and thrives on sacrifice. The more we bestow—the more we are prepared to spend. God had put out and expended long-suffering and patience and grief and holy striving on His Nineveh. And is He to have no return? No interest from this invested devotion? It is just the Old Testament version of the missing sheep, the lost coin, the wayward

son. If we be straitened we are not straitened to God, but in ourselves.

For the love of God is broader
  Than the measures of man's mind;
And the Heart of the Eternal
  Is most wonderfully kind.

¶ Robert Browning, in his poem *Saul*, represents the youthful David mourning over the sad decay that has fallen upon the powers of the first King of Israel, and rising as he communes with his own heart to this high faith, that his own pity for human sin and sorrow is but a spark from the glowing fire of pity in the heart of God.

Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?[1]

5. The text sends a shaft of tender light into God's dealings with mankind; it reminds us that as He looks down upon the millions of heathen, upon hordes of uncivilized men, among whom, after all, there is much innocent child life, full of just such enjoyment as abounds throughout the domain of nature, He sees much in which His fatherly heart can take pleasure. The world below the level of its perverted moral life is very dear to God. He delights in the works of His hands. The flowers of the field are beautiful, the birds of the air are blithe and full of song, the cattle upon the hills browse in contentment, because God loves them and cares tenderly for them.

(1) God has compassion on the children of godless parents. There is a magnificent limit to the omnipotence of God—the limit imposed by His love. His power cannot pass the boundaries of His heart. All the voices of the universe called for the death of Nineveh—all but one. Law called for it; prudence called for it; morality called for it; political economy called for it; the survival of the fittest called for it. But there was one thing which cried against it—God's compassion for the infants. It

[1] D. Connor.

was a solitary voice—a voice crying in the wilderness. It was unsupported by the voice of policy, the voice of worldly prudence, the voice of public opinion. It gave no cause for its cry. It did not say, "These infants may be good some day, great some day, believers some day." It was the wilderness that made the cry; it was sheer pity for the helpless that opened the arms of God.

¶ Mr. Sully, a great authority on Psychology, who has written most learnedly on the subject of children, has recently published a book containing some very striking and beautiful incidents in child life. But not one struck me more than this—a little boy in a moment of frankness and confidence, in speaking to his mother, said that if he could ask God for what he liked, he would ask God to love him when he was naughty. Truly as Christ said, we are taught the perfection of wisdom out of the mouths of babes.[1]

(2) God's tender pity reaches to the cattle. If we love all things both great and small, we are in good company. We remember Columba of Iona, and how the old white horse was so knit with him in fellowship that it discerned the approach of his death before Diarmaid and Baithene understood their impending grief; we remember Francis of Assisi, and how he tamed the wolf and preached to the twittering swallows; and John Woolman out on the Atlantic, and how he "observed the dull appearance of the fowls at sea, and the pining sickness of some of them, and often recalled the Fountain of Goodness who gave being to them all." We think of Robert Herrick, lamenting the loss of his spaniel Tracie with "one teare" though the lowly friend "deserved a million"; of Matthew Arnold, singing the elegy of the dachshund Geist, with his "temper of heroic mould," his "liquid melancholy eye," and all his life and all his love crowded into four short years; of Dr. John Brown, celebrating the loyalty and affection of Rab. A man should wish to surround himself with the wisest and gentlest associates; and it will dignify one to move in so gracious a society.

¶ William Blake has a sweet little poem to a lamb. He says—

> Little Lamb, who made thee?
> Dost thou know who made thee,
> Gave thee life, and bade thee feed
> By the stream and o'er the mead;

[1] Hugh Price Hughes.

Gave thee clothing of delight
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Then he tells the lamb who made it—God. God made the little lamb.

In another poem he asks the tiger the same question—

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
. . . . .
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who *made the lamb make thee*?

Yes, God made the tiger too. He made heaven and earth and *all that in them is*—all the angels in heaven, all the animals on earth. The same God made them all; and He loves all that He makes, and is sorry when an animal is hurt on earth, as He would be sorry if an angel were hurt in heaven.

For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.[1]

¶ In the popular traditions of East and West, Jonah's name alone has survived the Lesser Prophets of the Jewish Church. It still lives not only in many a Mussulman tomb along the coasts and hills of Syria, but in the thoughts and devotions of Christendom. The marvellous escape from the deep, through a single passing allusion in the Gospel history, was made an emblem of the deliverance of Christ Himself from the jaws of death and the grave. The great Christian doctrine of the boundless power of human repentance received its chief illustration from the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah. There is hardly any figure from the Old Testament which the early Christians in the Catacombs so often took as their consolation in persecution as the deliverance of Jonah on the seashore, and his naked form stretched out in the burning sun beneath the sheltering gourd. But these all conspire with the story itself in proclaiming that still wider lesson of the goodness of God. It is the rare protest of theology against the excess of theology—it is the faithful delineation through all its various states, of the dark, sinister,

[1] J. M. Gibbon, *In the Days of Youth*, 115.

selfish side of even great religious teachers. It is the grand Biblical appeal to the common instincts of humanity, and to the universal love of God, against the narrow dogmatism of sectarian polemics. There has never been a "generation" which has not needed the majestic revelation of sternness and charity, each bestowed where most deserved and where least expected, in the "sign of the Prophet Jonah."[1]

[1] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 305.

Life for God.

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LIFE FOR GOD.

What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Mic. vi. 8.

1. ISAIAH of Jerusalem and Micah the Morashtite, who lived at the same time, present a striking contrast. Isaiah was by birth an aristocrat, if not of royal descent; Micah was a yeoman from an obscure village. Isaiah was a statesman, Micah an evangelist. Isaiah addressed himself to the largest and highest political issues; Micah dealt with social morality and personal religion. It is not without significance that at first, though not ultimately, the fervent and pointed preaching of Micah was more effective than the majestic statesmanship and sublime teaching of Isaiah. An intensely interesting passage in the Book of Jeremiah (xxxvi. 18) reveals the important fact that the famous reformation of Hezekiah was the direct result of the preaching of Micah.

Isaiah and Micah agree absolutely in their essential teaching, but each contemplates the present and the future from his own standpoint. Micah, a humble-minded countryman, realized the special wickedness of the two great Hebrew capitals, Jerusalem and Samaria. He drew a graphic picture of the social vices of the time. The judges were venal, the princes corrupt, the prophets mercenary; mammonism and luxury were rampant; the rich coveted fields and houses, and were ever extending their estates, crushing the poor, and divorcing the people from the soil. Those in authority remorselessly fleeced and flayed the hapless people. On the other hand, there was a most extravagant expenditure. The Temple and the city were made magnificent. But Micah, instead of being carried away by this architectural splendour, saw in the sanctuary and in the palaces of the privileged the blood of the disinherited, the exploited, the down-trodden poor. "They build up Zion," he cries out, "with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity."

2. Now God, the King and Judge of His people, comes down from His lofty throne, His awful seat of judgment, to speak to rebellious Israel in another tone and under another character. He has rebuked in vain, He has punished in vain. His people go on sinning and heed none of His judgments. He feels that no small part of their sin is but senseless folly and perverseness. So He comes down not to command but to argue. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord"; and this is the meaning of Micah as well as of Isaiah. God is resolved to plead His own cause against Israel as though He were an equal; and He invites them to meet Him in the presence of the everlasting hills. For many an age those hills have looked down in silent, unchanging majesty on all the doings and all the sufferings of the people. Through summer and winter, day and night, sunshine and storm, they have remained the same, while one generation after another has been born and has grown up and has died out. In their solemn, stately presence God desires to have the matter argued out as between Him and His people. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel."

3. There is no attempt of the people to do what they had been invited to do. They will not stand out openly beside the Lord and state their complaints against Him. They neither deny what He has done for them nor yet confess it. They have nothing to plead against Him, yet they will not say so. But they take for granted that He is a hard, grasping, exacting master. They think this argument of His with them is only meant to wring something out of them. So they demand to know how much He will take to let them off. Instead of honestly pleading their cause, they blindly inquire how they may satisfy the demands of the Lord. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

4. The text is the answer given to these wild and desperate questions, not directly by the Lord Himself, but by His holy prophet. The prophet has to speak for God to the people; but he is also himself one of the people, and so his message is that of a man who has gone through the same discipline as themselves. But the difference in his heart from their hearts has made all the course of life have a different look to him from what it has to them; and he speaks out of that which he knows, because he has felt it in himself. Not in language of rebuke or threatening, but in simple appeal to what they too might have known if they would, does he fulfil his office as God's spokesman among men.

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Not the gifts which wealth can buy, not the sacrifices of selfish fear, not these shall bring you near to Him. You have nought to give but what He first bestowed on you, and with a breath could take away again. It is character that He wants, not presents—moral and spiritual character, integrity of soul, truth in the inward parts, and the pure heart which alone can see God. Not what you bring with you, but what you yourself are, can alone be your passport into His presence. Not your many prayers, not your bended knees, not your psalm singing, not your sound opinions, not your pious customs, your Sabbaths and fasts and many other observances, not these, but your just conduct, your merciful spirit, and your lowly heart, shall open to you the strait gate that leadeth unto life eternal.

¶ In the eighth century B.C., in the heart of a world of idolatrous polytheists, the Hebrew prophets put forth a conception of religion which appears to me to be as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Pheidias or the science of Aristotle. "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" If any so-called religion takes away from this great saying of Micah, I think it wantonly mutilates, while, if it adds thereto, I think it obscures the perfect ideal of religion.[1]

¶ The Congressional Library in Washington is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. Each alcove of the reading-room is decorated with a distinct and separate design, the decorations

[1] Huxley, in *The Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1885.

in one alcove being in honour of art, in another of history, science, music, philosophy, etc. Before the motto was chosen for the alcove of religion, the Committee entrusted with the matter sent out a request to prominent clergymen and leading religious teachers asking them to send in such for competition. The motto finally selected was the text from Micah—"And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."[1]

¶ If, indeed, there be a nobler life in us than in these strangely moving atoms,—if, indeed, there is an eternal difference between the fire which inhabits them, and that which animates us,—it must be shown, by each of us in his appointed place, not merely in the patience, but in the activity of our hope; not merely by our desire, but our labour, for the time when the Dust of the generations of men shall be confirmed for foundations of the gates of the city of God. The human clay, now trampled and despised, will not be—cannot be—knit into strength and light by accidents or ordinances of unassisted fate. By human cruelty and iniquity it has been afflicted;—by human mercy and justice it must be raised; and, in all fear or questioning of what is or is not, the real message of creation, or of revelation, you may assuredly find perfect peace, if you are resolved to do that which your Lord has plainly required,—and content that He should indeed require no more of you,—than to do Justice, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with Him.[2]

I.

"Do justly."

1. Justice, righteousness—that is the basis of all moral character, the essential quality of a good man. It is a great word this "righteousness," and covers all our relations to each other and to God, forbidding wrong of every kind and under any plea, placing all men, high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish, on the same moral level, and calling us to do justly to them all alike, for that is the due of the meanest and the weakest as much as of the greatest.

Justice is one of God's own glorious attributes. He is a just God; there is no unrighteousness in Him. He would have His

[1] A. Lewis, *Sermons Preached in England*, 221.

[2] Ruskin, *Ethics of the Dust*, Lect. x. § 121 (*Works*, xviii. 360).

children to be like Him, and thus reflect His image. The child of God should be just to his servants, his customers, his employees, to all with whom he has any dealings. Masters should be just to their servants, giving them a fair equivalent for their work. Servants ought to deal justly with their employers in filling their working hours with honest labour instead of trying to escape with doing as little as possible.

Justice had been taught Israel by institutions like the jubilee year, which rectified the wrongs that periodically recur in complicated society—giving liberty to helpless slaves, and restoration of land to those from whom it had been alienated. Merciful provision for the poor was made through institutions from which the twentieth century has still much to learn, even while we thankfully acknowledge the labours of good men who have abrogated the cruel acts of olden time in England. Consideration for others was taught by ordinances like those which forbade the second going over of the vines and the gleaning of the fields. Even capitalists and owners were to be taught that they had no right to secure to themselves all they could get. The claim of the labourer for a day's wage for the day's work was not to be neglected, was not even to be delayed in settlement, and the vicious principles of long credit and consequent usury were hit hard by Mosaic laws. On the other hand, man's relations to God were indicated by the Sabbath days, which were God's claim on time; by the tithes, which were God's claim on income; by the first-fruits, which were God's claim on increase; by thank-offerings, which were God's claim on thankfulness; and by burnt-offerings, which symbolized God's claim on a man's whole self. The more we study the institutions of the old dispensation, the more clearly we see the truth of Micah's declaration so far as every son of Israel was concerned: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good."

2. What is our obligation to be just? Is it the civil and criminal courts of law? The large majority of unjust acts are not punishable by these courts. Is it the belief in a coming day of judgment? That is an obligation to self-interest, not to justice. Is it the welfare of the greatest number? In the order of nature number one is the greatest, and each man is for himself. Is it

the existence of a power called conscience? That is the very thing to be explained. What *is* conscience? It means literally a "knowing together." In the things of this world it is the sight of my brother in my own looking-glass, my seeing of him in me. In the most common act of justice, I have, I must have, a double vision; he and I are reflected in one mirror. There can be no justice without sympathy, and there can be no sympathy without substitution.

It is a familiar doctrine of theologians that Christ "offered up a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice"—to pay the debts of man. It is truer than some of these theologians dream of. It is not an abnormal, a miraculous thing. It is the illustration of a universal principle which holds always, everywhere. To estimate the debt of another is not an easy thing; it demands a sacrifice. It was a bold and a deep insight which ventured to affirm that Christ Himself was no exception to the law. To estimate the debts of man He, too, had to descend—to sacrifice. He, too, had to begin, not only by self-forgetfulness, but by incorporating a new self—a servant's form. He had to put Himself in the place, in the environment, of the debtor. He had to consider his circumstances, to live within his experience. He had to measure the influence of his heredity, the force of his passions, the strength of his temptations, the contagion of his surroundings, the power of his examples, the bane of his upbringing. All this and infinitely more, to Christ, to us, to every living spirit, is involved in estimating the moral debt of another.

¶ When we affirm that justice is an attribute of God, our conception of justice is a human one, but if man is made in the image of God, as Christianity affirms, and God not fashioned after the image of man, the fact that it is a human conception does not prevent it from being an attribute which really exists in God; and when we affirm that God's justice is perfect we mean that God's omniscience gives Him a perfect knowledge of the minutest circumstances connected with each individual, and that this enables Him to estimate correctly the precise degree of his responsibility. This knowledge man has not, and, therefore, as far as this ignorance prevails, his estimate of the character of an act is imperfect, and, consequently, the judgment formed of it partakes of the same degree of imperfection. But this defect of our knowledge does not prevent our conception of justice from

being a true representation of that attribute as it exists in God. The only difference between justice as administered by God and justice as administered by man is that the omniscience of God enables Him to take into account the circumstances of a man's birth, of his surroundings, and of those tendencies which have been transmitted from ancestors, with the formation of which as an individual he has had nothing to do, and for which he is therefore irresponsible. This a human judge is incapable of doing, and therefore justice, as administered by him, is necessarily imperfect.[1]

II.

"Love mercy."

1. There is an instinctive mercy in the heart of man. It is described by one word—pity. Pity is the instinct of mercy, and it belongs to man as man. But is pity also the *love* of mercy? Love supposes some object of attraction. Does pity imply an object of attraction? Is the sensation of pity one of attraction at all? In the living being attraction involves a certain amount of pleasure. Is not the sensation of pity one of pain? It is true men go to witness on the stage scenes of horror. But they do not go on *account* of the horror; they wish to see the situations of dramatic power which the horror will bring forth. Pity is a sensation which in itself and by itself is painful, and therefore repulsive. The men of the most pitiful nature are precisely those who wish most to avoid it. This is surely not the love of mercy.

¶ Where will you find a kinder-hearted soul than Oliver Goldsmith? No beggar's cry could reach his ear without emptying his pocket. And yet, if Oliver saw the beggar in the distance, he turned the corner to escape him. It was not the wish to protect his money; it was the desire to escape the pain of a sad story. How many a young minister making his parochial rounds feels exactly the same in relation to the contact with sorrow![2]

2. But the prophet tells us that we must love mercy. There is no religion without love. The man who does good, but does not love, is not a good man. He pretends to be, but would be different

[1] C. A. Row, *Future Retribution*, 24.
[2] G. Matheson, *The Bible Definition of Religion*, 35.

if he could. Hence, while the prophet begins with doing, he reminds us that our doing justly must spring from a corresponding inward motive, which he describes as loving mercy. This is the only guarantee that we shall act in accordance with justice. It alone supplies the power which shall keep us up to this standard of conduct in face of difficulty or strong temptation to forsake it. If a man does not love a principle or the course of action which is prescribed, he will find some way of evading or only partially recognizing it. And to do justly is often so directly opposed to what seems to our advantage at the time, or to what our natural instincts prefer, that nothing will enable us to overcome these but the love which pays homage to righteousness for its own sake, and finds more satisfaction in doing it than could possibly be found under any circumstances by its sacrifice. And it is not only justice we are to love but mercy. For the best way to secure that a lower duty shall be done is to love a higher one that embraces it. Even to love to give a man what is really his due is not to be governed by the most generous of motives. It encourages a precise and rigid way of looking at things. It is always ready with its foot-rule to see that it gives no more, if it gives no less, than the precise measurement. It stands with the scales in its hands (as Justice was fabled to do of old) and is mainly concerned to see that the beam of the balance is straight. But we are required to do something more than this. We are to love mercy.

Many fulfil the first requirement but stop short at the second. They do justly, but they do not love mercy. They are as upright as a marble column, and as cold and as hard. They lift themselves up in their integrity like some snow-clad mountain peak; but it is always winter-time with them; no gentle beam ever falls on them to thaw the ice, and make the generous stream to flow in blessing to the valley beneath. They never ask any favours and they never wish to give any.

¶ A sage, Baroka by name, while walking one day in a crowded market-place, suddenly encountered the prophet Elijah, and asked him, who—out of that vast multitude—would receive the highest reward in the Future State. Whereupon the Prophet pointed out a weird-looking person—a turnkey, because he was merciful to his prisoners. And next, two commonplace workmen

who were walking through the crowd pleasantly chatting together. The sage instantly rushed after them and asked "In what consists your special merit?" But they, much puzzled, replied: "We are but poor workmen. All that can be said for us is that we are always of a cheerful spirit and good-natured. When we meet anybody who seems sad we join him, and we talk to him, and cheer him till he forgets his grief. And if we know of two persons who have quarrelled, we talk to them and persuade them till we have made them friends again. Nothing more. This is our whole life."[1]

Small things are best;
Grief and unrest
To rank and wealth are given;
But little things
On little wings
Bear little souls to heaven.

3. When a man loves mercy and exercises mercy towards men because of his love for humanity, he will have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and to look upon all he has and is as a means to an end. If God has given a man an abundance of this world's goods, it is not that he may sit in idleness, but that he may become the benefactor of men. If He has given one broad shoulders and strong muscles, it is not that he may tyrannize over the strong, but that he may lift up the weak. If to another He has given great powers of mind and heart, it is not that he may make others his servants, but that those powers may be utilized to the blessing of humanity.

¶ Think of that noble Father Damien among the lepers at Molokai—the lovely island in a smiling sea, which looks a Paradise, but is the home of miserable lepers who long for death. Their only hope has come through that brave messenger of mercy who was himself stricken with the fell disease and wrote to a friend: "Almighty God knows what is best for my sanctification and with that conviction I say daily a good '*Fiat voluntas tua*'—let Thy will be done."

Think, lad, of living one's life, one's life with such as these;
To leave all bright and fair for horror and foul disease,
For the sick that none can cure, the sore that none can aid—
Do you think the stoutest heart could face it undismayed?

[1] *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov. 21, 1913.

And more—to know full well its like will come to pass,
One's own clean body and sound shall be this hideous mass,
This loathsome, shuddering heap one fain would put away
In the breast of the kindly earth, to hide from the eye of day.

He heard the call nor stayed: "My Master, here am I!"
His work was there, and he went to do his work and die.
Hope to the hopeless he bore, and the comfort that comforteth
To the hearts of men who lay in the vale of the Shade of Death.

He has loved and worked for the lepers, it's now the fourteenth year,
And the stroke has fallen at last, and the end it draweth near;
He will love and work to the end, as surely the martyrs can
Who follow the bleeding feet of the martyr Son of Man,
The feet that fathom'd and scaled, or ever their rest was won,
The awful abyss of love, and its heights that know the sun.

III.

"Walk humbly with thy God."

Here we have a word which occurs nowhere else in the Bible. Translators have struggled with it. The earliest of them, the Greek translators of the Septuagint, render it "Prepare yourselves to walk with God." It seems to point, in the original, to that devotion of one's self to the purpose of knowing God which leads one to put everything else aside, to examine his own heart and life, to humble himself into a sense of his own ill desert which shall, as it were, empty his heart of all else, that God may come and dwell in it. It points to a private and personal discipline, and recalls the many other instances in the Bible where a man is spoken of as "dwelling in the secret place of the Most High," or entering into secret intercourse with his Maker.

1. Walking with God implies a personal faith in God. This is something more than a mere acknowledgment of God's existence, for "the devils believe and tremble"; it is something more

than a belief in an infinite power—it implies a faith in a personal God. A man cannot "walk with" the God of Pantheism or with the God of Deism. He may recognize the greatness of the latter, and have spiritual communion with the former, but he can only "walk with" the God of Theism—a personal, present God, who is the God of Christianity.

It is the peculiarity of the Bible that it makes God a personality, brings Him down into communion with men. Philosophy demonstrates and proves that there is a God by a slow logical process, and finally lifts us up on a great platform where we can take a telescopic view of the Almighty. Oriental mysticism meditates about God; it stands afar off and gazes upon the effluence of His glory. The Bible gives us a sense of a personal relation to Him. It is full of it. The Psalms overrun with it, and that is the reason why they live for ever, and are read more than any other part of the Old Testament. They are all glowing with a sense of the personal presence of God. They make us feel that affection, wisdom, goodness are not abstractions, but qualities of a kindred personality. That is the peculiarity of the Bible. It makes God a kindred personality; He hears our prayers and consorts with our weakness. There is a personal God revealed in the Bible, with whom we may commune and walk. As we do, we become like Him, and we obtain, therefore, in ourselves the real springs and powers of all good feeling and all good action. The essence of religion is in walking humbly with God; while we do this and when we do this we shall love mercy, we shall do justly.

¶ Personal Christianity is a communion of the soul with the living God through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Herein is really included all that belongs to the characteristic life of Christendom—revelation and faith, conversion and the comfort of forgiveness, the joy of faith and the service of love, lonely communion with God, and life in Christian fellowship. All this is only truly Christian when it is experienced as communion with the living God through the mediation of Christ. When we believe in a man's personal Christianity we are convinced that he stands in that relation towards God in which all this takes place.[1]

2. Walking humbly with God implies not only a personal

[1] W. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, 9.

faith in a personal God, but a personal faith in a personal God of infinite greatness, in the presence of whom humility must be shown. We must "bow low" and become as little children in order to enter His Kingdom. Such a faith in God means obedience and love of God. We are to love and hate what He loves and hates, for only as they are agreed can two walk together. The nations that have this faith in God most fully will survive longest. "The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits."

The Jew believed himself to be walking with God, and to be walking alone; he claimed a light which the surrounding nations had not. His attitude towards the God with whom he walked was deeply humble—rather too humble; he was afraid to commune with Him. But though he was too tremulous to enjoy his walk with God, he had great pride in the reputation of it. He wanted the surrounding nations to look at him as he passed by. He desired men to see that he had a peculiar privilege, that he was a marked man, a distinguished man. He wished those on the world's road to be aware that he was one out of the common—chosen, precious. His walk with God was not a *state* of pride, but it was a source of pride. He boasted of it; he displayed it. On the ground of it he separated himself from his kind. He dwelt apart from the nations. He recognized haughtily and at a distance the brotherhood of common men. He flourished in his hand that torch which gave him superior illumination, and he bade the outside multitude attend and admire. Such is the pride which Micah says pure religion must conquer.

¶ Humility is the great ornament and jewel of Christian religion; that whereby it is distinguished from all the wisdom of the world; it not having been taught by the wise men of the Gentiles, but first put into a discipline, and made part of a religion, by our Lord Jesus Christ; who propounded Himself imitable by His disciples so signally in nothing as in the twin sisters of meekness and humility; "learn of me, for I am meek and humble; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." For all the world, all that we are, and all that we have, our bodies and our souls, our actions and our sufferings, our conditions at home, our accidents abroad, our many sins and our seldom virtues, are as so many arguments to make our souls dwell low in the deep valleys of humility.[1]

[1] Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living*, chap. ii. sec. iv.

3. Is this everything? If to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with one's God is all that is required, what advantage hath Christianity? Much every way, but chiefly in this: man has ever known his duty, but he has ever lacked the power to fulfil it. Christianity alone has supplied the power. The world has been like a well-constructed but motionless machine; it needed what Christianity has supplied—motive power. Call it conscience, moral sense, natural religion, what you will, man has ever had a sacred witness and a faithful monitor; but what has that availed? The bitter cry of human helplessness has ever been going up:

> Ah, if he gives not arms as well as rules,
> What can he more than tell us we are fools?

Christianity has given "arms," whilst every other system merely furnished "rules."

The essentials of a religious life have always been the same. The difference between the Old Testament and the New is not a difference of kind, but a difference of degree. Jesus Christ repeatedly affirmed that He had not come to inaugurate a new religion. "Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." The law was given for a foundation, the "grace and truth" of Jesus Christ for fulfilment; just as the artist first places on the canvas the firm clear outlines of his figures, then lays on the colours which give grace to the form and expression to the features.

Our Lord has really added nothing to these words of Micah. What He has done has been to put these truths in a new setting; to read them with a wider and deeper application; to embody them in His own life, and thus to enforce them with greater authority; to give us a new motive for obedience, and greater power to obey. What does the cross of Christ say to us but "Do justly"? It shows us the enormity of sin, its awful consequences, its proper deserving, the rigour of the Divine justice which could not forgive without such satisfaction. What, again, does the cross of Christ say to us but "Love mercy"? There is the crowning exhibition of pity and love! We look, and say with John, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And it is at the cross that we find the way "to walk humbly with

our God." Every barrier has been removed there. Through Him who hangs there we have "access unto the Father."

¶ Speaking at the Keswick Convention in 1902, the Bishop of Durham (Dr. Handley Moule) remarked: "Twenty years ago, it was said to me by a young Oriental student at Cambridge, just on the verge of stepping into the full light of God and joy in Christ, after long and cautious inquiries into Christianity—it was said to me in words that I cannot forget—'I have been reading your sacred Book; and the difference between it and our sacred books in the East is not altogether in its precepts; for there are wonderful precepts, high and great, also in our books; but your Book, and yours alone, contains, I see, the secret of how they may be done.'"

¶ The power of man to stand between abstract truth upon the one side and the concrete facts of life upon the other comes from the co-existence in his human nature of two different powers, without the possession of both of which no man possesses a complete humanity. One of these powers is the power of knowing, and the other is the power of loving. The power of knowing, however the knowledge may be sought or won, whether by patient study or quick-leaping intuition, including imagination and all the poetic power, faith, trust in authority, the faculty of getting wisdom by experience, everything by which the human nature comes into direct relationship to truth, and tries to learn, and in any degree succeeds in knowing—that is one necessary element of manhood. And the other is Love, the power of sympathetic intercourse with things and people, the power to be touched by the personal nature with which we have to do—love therefore including hate, for hate is only the reverse utterance of love, the negative expression of the soul's affection; to hate anything is vehemently to love its opposite. Love thus, as the whole element of personal affection and relationship of every sort, this, too, is necessary, in order that a man may really be a man. . . .

The New Testament tells us of Jesus that He was full of Grace and Truth. Grace and Truth! It must have been in the perfect meeting of those two elements in Him that His mediatorship, His power to transmute the everlasting truths of God into the immediate help of needy men consisted. He was no rapt self-centred student of the abstract truth; nor was He the merely ready sentimental pitier of the woes of men. But in His whole nature there was finely wrought and combined the union of the abstract and eternal with the special and the personal, which made it possible for Him, without an effort, to come down from the mountain where He had been glorified with the light of God,

and take up instantly the cure of the poor lunatic in the valley; or to descend from the hill where He had been praying, to save His disciples half-shipwrecked on the lake; or to turn His back on the comforting angels of Gethsemane, that He might give Himself into the hands of the soldiers who were to lead Him to the cross.[1]

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Twenty Sermons*, 8.

Life by Faith.

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Life by Faith.

The just shall live by his faith.—Hab. ii. 4.

There is no single text in the Old Testament that plays a larger rôle in the doctrinal discussions of the New Testament than this little sentence from the prophecy of the prophet Habakkuk. It is also one of the foundation stones on which Martin Luther built his anti-papal doctrines of the Reformation, and changed the course of Church History.

¶ Six hundred and thirteen affirmative and negative precepts, says the Talmud, are in the Law given to Moses on Sinai. Since the giving of that Law many a compendium of these hundreds has been suggested. The Psalmist compressed them into eleven. These are to be found in Psalm xv. "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle. He who walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart," and so forth. Isaiah contracted them into six; Micah into three, "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." The second Isaiah into two, "Observe justice and do charity." But then came Habakkuk and comprehended them all in that one phrase—"The just man shall live by his faith" (Maccoth 23).[1]

To do justice to this great text we must consider it first in its historical setting, and then in the application of it in the New Testament.

I.

The Original Meaning of the Words.

1. This text was written on the eve of a Chaldæan invasion. The heathen were coming into Judæa, as we see them still in the Assyrian sculptures—civilizing, after their barbarous fashion, the

[1] S. Singer, *Sermons and Memoir*, 279.

nations round them—conquering, massacring, transporting whole populations, building cities and temples by their forced labour; and resistance or escape was impossible. The prophet is perplexed. What is this but a triumph of evil? Is there a Divine Providence? Is there a just Ruler of the world? And he breaks out into pathetic expostulation with God Himself: "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in the net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?"

Thus Habakkuk had to face the problem of the strength of the wicked and the humiliation of the just. It had been the problem with which Job had wrestled, and the Psalmist and Ecclesiastes; but now it thrust itself into notice under serious and startling aggravations. These arose from the struggles of suffering innocence, but hitherto they had presented themselves mainly in individual instances. The miseries of the individual might be explained away as a result of the infinite complications of human life; but when the sufferer was not a man, but a nation, the chosen people, the seed of Abraham, God's servants, the only nation which did not worship carved images or deal in heathen gods, it was natural that terrible misgiving should overcloud the souls of men. Belief in the protection of Jehovah had been the main element in the religious conviction of the Jew. Was it not shattered to the dust? The cry of the prophet went up in his perplexity with the question, so often asked before and since, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?" "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?"

He had spoken out his doubt and his distress, and therefore he had not to wait long for an answer. As one who stands upon a watch-tower, straining his eyes for the first gleam of the spears

and helmets of a hostile or a friendly army, so he watched, as from the fenced place whence the vision of the truth was seen, to see what the Lord would say to him, what answer he should give when men mocked and taunted him. Then, as the sunlight rises upon the watchman who all night long has looked out through the darkness, the Lord answered him and said, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." Not on the papyrus roll, but on tables of wood or stone; not in the cursive hand of scribes, but in the large characters employed by the sculptor of a graven monument, legible to the distant traveller as he passed at full speed, he was to make known, as Isaiah had done before him, the words that were to be the stay and comfort of his own soul, and of the souls of his people. He was assured, by that word of the Lord which came to his inward spirit, that the vision of a Divine order in the midst of the world's confusions would come at the appointed time in the fulness of its truth. "At the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it." The attitude of patient, trustful expectation was the truest and the best for him. That expectation should not always be disappointed. "It will surely come; it will not tarry." So prefaced and so proclaimed, the words were sown on the wide fields of the world's history. "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just by his faith shall live."

¶ Faith means vision. The constant sense of things unseen and eternal. Faith means trust. Daily confidence in the faithful Creator, the loving Redeemer. Faith means expectation. The anticipation of the recompense of the reward. Faith is the root, hope is the blossom, charity is the flower of true religion. Let me beware of the technical, the tangible, the formal in my religious life; let me keep intact the ethereal cords which bind me to the upper universe, and which bring into my life the spiritual electricity on which everything depends. I live by trust, love, admiration, fellowship, revealing themselves and justifying themselves in obedience.[1]

2. The terms used by the prophet need to be accurately defined. He says, "The just" or "righteous" shall endure in his faithfulness.

(1) The word "just" means exactly what is meant by the

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Gates of Dawn*, 34.

word "righteous." The just are the righteous, and the righteous are the just. Now "the just," or "the righteous" are such as are in the right. The idea is rather forensic, and belongs to a court of law. In a trial in court, the righteous man was the one who had the right on his side. In its primitive sense it was merely a juridical right, with no idea of ethical righteousness. Gradually this idea gathered to itself a moral and religious character, and extended to and included right conduct toward God, and toward His creatures. "The just" or "righteous" of the Old Testament is scarcely more than what we call "the sincere," or what the New Testament calls a true heart, even when estimated at its highest. The "righteous" man, then, is the true, sincere one, whose words and works are in full harmony with the laws of right and so of God.

(2) The term rendered "faith" meant to the prophet simple "faithfulness." The Old Testament has no word for faith as an active principle, but has two passages in which the word *amun* or *amunah* is translated "faith." One of these is Deut. xxxii. 20, in which the children of Israel are spoken of as "children who have no faith," or steadfastness. "Unfaithful children" would better express the thought. The other instance is the text. These are not the only examples of faith in the Old Testament, as the eleventh chapter of Hebrews abundantly testifies, but they are the only uses of the word, and in each case the real meaning is "faithfulness." Naturally the one speaking of the absence of faithfulness is little used and relatively unimportant; but the one which speaks of it as a saving principle or consideration is one of the chief stones in the mosaic of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. In the New Testament the Apostle quotes this passage more than once, but reduces faithfulness in conduct to its root in the heart, and calls it "faith." It is well that he does so. "Faithfulness" is the Old Testament word. "Faith" is the word of the New Testament. This same word which in the text is translated "faith" is translated "faithfulness" ten times, which along with other derivatives from the same root translated "faithful," "faithfully," etc., make over fifty passages in which this rendering prevails. These two passages are the only ones in which it is translated "faith," and it would not have been so translated here except to make it conform to the New Testament rendering. The

Hebrew term indeed is much larger than faith, and carries in itself the idea of firmness, steadfastness, faithfulness. It is used of the holding up of Moses' hands by Aaron and Hur (Exod. xvii. 12): "his hands were steadiness"; of the stability of the times (Is. xxxiii. 6); of the trustworthiness of one in office (2 Kings xxii. 7); of an office as a trust (1 Chron. ix. 22, 26); in connexion with righteousness (Prov. xii. 17); and of right conduct in general. The basis of its meaning is the verb to "believe," and in its many connexions to believe in God. The root-idea of the noun is belief in, and faithfulness exercised toward, God in true whole-hearted obedience.

3. We are now in a position to appreciate the meaning of this great prophetic utterance. A righteous one, exercising true faithfulness, shall live, shall endure; and (to add the Hebrew idea) shall endure affliction and reproaches with patience and long-suffering. The righteous man through his faithfulness shall live perpetually.

Here then is the oracle to the troubled prophet and the trembling nation. It has two sides. The first is the old law. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; more than that, it shall die because of its sin, for "the wages of sin is death"; still more, it is potentially and in reality dead already, for sin is death. You see a guilty nation apparently triumphing. It carries its own sentence of death. "But the righteous man shall live by his fidelity." Righteousness may be hated, persecuted, maligned, slandered, imprisoned, beaten, burnt, crucified over and over again. That is in one form or another the lot of righteousness on earth. Nevertheless, righteousness is life, sin is death. That was essentially the oracle of Habakkuk, to Judah, and to all mankind.

The words came to Habakkuk as the solution of many dark and difficult problems; it gave him strength for the battle of his life, and was to him, as the "prophetic word" has ever been, as a light shining in the darkness; but, unless we ascribe to him a foresight differing in kind as well as in degree from anything that Scripture warrants us in connecting with a prophet's work, we cannot think of him as seeing far into its future history. Not for him was the vision of all the wondrous destiny of those wondrous words—how they were to be the starting-point of a new stage in

the spiritual life of mankind, the glad tidings of great joy to myriads of penitent and contrite hearts,—kindling in the heart of St. Paul the fire which was never to be extinguished,—stirring the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to his long muster-roll of the heroes of a faith which overcomes the world,—casting a ray of brightness even across the dreariness of the Talmud—starting ever and anon, in Augustine and Luther, and a thousand lesser prophets, as on a fresh career of victory, conquering and to conquer,—the trumpet-call of the Church's warfare, the watch-word of mighty controversies, the *articulus stantis vel cadentis Ecclesiæ*. Yes, in the very van of that goodly fellowship of preachers was that prophet of whom we now know so little, whom we have almost lost out of our sight in the great procession of his followers. The first preacher of the truth of justification by faith was not Luther, or Augustine, or Paul, but the prophet Habakkuk.

¶ In answer to an inquiry from his brother Robert as to his opinion of Mr. J. H. Newman's recent work on Justification, Bishop Wilberforce wrote: "The *living* faith which is the formal cause of our Justification is a compound, an assent of the Understanding to the truth of what God reveals and a co-existing going forth of the Will approving of and choosing it. Now this is wholly independent of *good works*. Let time indeed be given and this principle will necessarily produce Good Works, but still by a *necessary accident*. It is not, I mean, the *future* production of Good Works which makes the difference between the one and the other, but the *present difference* of the Will. The man may die before he has had time to produce one Good Work, yet his living Faith is not made to have been dead, by Christ. You show me two seeds; one is a dead seed, the other a living. I cannot see the difference; so I say, 'Plant them and then the living seed *will grow*'; but it is not this after-growing which constitutes its life. It was just as much alive before it began to grow. The living principle within made it unlike the dead seed: only my infirmity prevented my being able to detect it. So in Faith. The living Faith, before the least possibility of working, is wholly different from the dead Faith, and God sees this; and the man in whom it is, is freely and as much justified as if he had worked ever so much."[1]

¶ However he may have stated it in the old familiar forms of bargain, this was Luther's real doctrine of justification by faith.

[1] A. R. Ashwell, *Life of Samuel Wilberforce*, i. 121.

It was mystic, not dogmatic. It was of the soul and the experience, not of the reason. Faith was not an act, but a being—not what you did, but what you were. The whole truth of the immanence of God and of the essential belonging of the human life to the Divine—the whole truth that God is a power *in* man and not simply a power over man, building him as a man builds a house, guiding him as a man steers a ship, this whole truth, in which lies the seed of all humanity, all progress, all great human hope, lay in the truth that justification was by faith and not by works. No wonder that Luther loved it. No wonder that he thought it critical. No wonder that he wrote to Melanchthon, hesitating at Augsburg, "Take care that you give not up justification by faith. That is the heel of the seed of the woman which is to crush the serpent's head."[1]

¶ "For my part," was Stephen Crisp's strong language in one of his sermons—"for my part, my tongue shall as soon drop out of my mouth as oppose the doctrine of being justified by faith in Christ; but let me tell you this may be misapplied. . . . If a man hope to be saved by Christ, he must be ruled by Him. It is contrary to all manner of reason that the devil should rule a man, and Christ be his Saviour."[2]

II.

The Deeper Interpretation.

1. The note struck in Habakkuk rings on through the whole New Testament. We find the words quoted three times, and applied so comprehensively as to embrace the whole Christian life within their scope. In Gal. iii. 11 they specially refer to the beginning of that life, the justification of the sinner who confides in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. By faith he passes from the curse of the Law into the position and privileges of a son of God. In Heb. x. 38 the text is quoted in another sense, and refers to the continuance of the Christian life in steadfastness and strength through all its probation of earthly trial. The life which was received by faith is maintained by faith to the very end. Then, in Rom. i. 17, St. Paul quotes the words in a way which seems to include both of these ideas. From first to

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 383.
[2] F. A. Budge, *Annals of the Early Friends*, 144.

last faith admits man to the blessings of the covenant of grace. God unveils His righteousness little by little, stage by stage, to the believer. It is the eye of faith that sees the unfolding vision, the hand of faith that grasps the ever-opening blessing. The revelation of the gospel in its justifying, sanctifying, transforming power is given, not from faith to struggling, as we often mistakenly think, but "from faith to faith."

St. Paul found in the words a meaning that Habakkuk did not dream of. To the Galatian Judaizers he saw that there was another, truer source of righteousness, and therefore of life, than the rigid observance of rites and precepts, or than the lifelong accumulation of deeds of an outward ethical obedience; to believe in God and in His righteousness, in His will to give what He demands, in His justice and His love; to trust that Will in all the chances of life, in all the convulsions of the spirit, was to find peace and life. But the words which follow show the new object of faith which was present to his mind. It was no longer simply the moral government of God. With an abruptness more impressive than any logical precision, he shows what his own mind was dwelling on: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." It was to that he turned as the source of all hope and peace. The Son of the Eternal Father had come to share man's sorrows, to identify Himself with man's sins, to know and bear even the curse which follows upon sin. The very form and manner of His death had upon it the brand of such a curse; and therefore that death had been mighty in its power to redeem men from the curse. The law required obedience, and here was an obedience perfect even unto death. It demanded nothing less than life, and here the life was offered as a sacrifice, precious, without spot, acceptable. By trusting Him, trusting God manifested in Christ and reconciling the world unto Himself, as the prophet had trusted Him when He made bare His arm in the crash of armies and the fall of empires, the Apostle might hope to find the righteousness and life which on the other track were ever slipping from his grasp.

The teaching of the Epistle to the Romans is in this, as in other things, an expansion of that of the Epistle to the Galatians. What had before come to St. Paul out of the depths of his own

experience, swift as an arrow, sharp as a two-edged sword, in the controversy which he was then waging, was now seen in its bearing upon the wider questions of the religious history of mankind. The history of the Gentile world showed that the witness of the eternal power and Godhead in the things that are seen was not enough, that even the law written in men's hearts was not enough to save them from a fathomless degradation. The history of Israel showed that even the oracles of God, and the covenants and the promises, even the voice on Sinai and the word that spoke by the prophets, were not enough to raise men from hypocrisy, formalism, selfishness. For both something more was needed, and that something was found in the revelation of the Divine character as seen in the humanity of Christ. So it was that the thoughts of the Apostle rose to the height of that great argument. Among the marvellous fruits of the seed sown by Habakkuk, cast like seed-corn upon the waters, to be found again after many days, we may place the Epistle to the Romans.

¶ We do not recognize all that Paul means when he describes the Christian experience unless we lay the emphasis on the Divine grace and the human faith. While faith calls into exercise, and free and full exercise, the whole personality of man, it is not understood as Paul understood it, if it is regarded as a task to be done by man's strenuous effort. If faith were this, salvation would be of works, and grace would not be grace. The stress in Paul's doctrine is on the objective facts of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection; the subjective states of being crucified and risen with Christ are the necessary effects of these facts, where a man submits himself to Christ. Faith is not a productive, but a receptive energy. It is the greater personality of Christ which inspires and sustains that dependence on, communion with, and submission to, Him which results in a man's moral transformation. In these days, when on the one hand the Jesus of history is receding into the distant past, and on the other the Christ of faith is being sublimated into a moral and religious ideal, the identity of both needs to be insisted on to make the one present and the other real. It is the real presence of the personal Saviour and Lord which alone explains Paul's own experience, and the experience which he assumed to be common to all believers. The moral passion and power of the Apostle can be recovered by the Christian Church to-day only as it recognizes the moral meaning of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of

Christ, and reproduces that moral content in personal union with Him.[1]

2. Luther's one corner-stone of the Reformation, in opposition to the decrees, decretals, and bulls of Rome, was this text. In his interpretation of it, he did not read it, "The just by faith shall live," the man who is made just by his faith, but the one who is just, having been so made by God Himself, shall live, endure, through his belief and faith in God. Belief and faith in the Church, in popes and decrees, is ineffectual, does not make for endurance, for salvation, for eternal life. Luther's tremendous emphasis upon the main teaching of this text made it a kind of battle-cry of freedom among the German reformers.

Once enunciated, the doctrine spread rapidly; faith as a grain of mustard-seed waxed a great tree; the morsel of yeast leavened the whole lump. In the secular twentieth century it requires a slight effort of the imagination to realize what enthusiasm a purely religious idea might arouse in the sixteenth. That it did so is certain; undoubtedly because multitudes were sick of the holiness of works offered them by the Church, and longed for a more spiritual religion. Though it may be admitted that the antithesis has often been exaggerated, nevertheless the popular idea remains roughly right—that the Reformation meant a movement from a mechanical to an individual and subjective conception of religion. It was the same need of doing away with externals and seeking an immediate relation to God that moved the mystics of the fourteenth century; but Europe was not then ripe for the idea. The explanation of Luther's success where Tauler failed is partly found in the timely elements with which he combined his original thought. His own experience was but the nucleus around which was gathered all that was most vital in the thought of the age—the return to the Bible, to Augustine, and to mysticism, the protest against the sophistries of the Schoolmen and against the corruption of the Church, and a simpler, more individual relation of the soul to God. Above all, Martin Luther was fitted to be the prophet of his age because he had the most searching experience in what that age imperiously demanded—personal religion.

[1] A. E. Garvie, *Studies of Paul and his Gospel*, 185.

Lo, Lord, Thou know'st, I would not anything
That in the heart of God holds not its root;
Nor falsely deem there's any life at all
That doth in Him nor sleep nor shine nor sing;
I know the plants that bear the noisome fruit
Of burning and of ashes and of gall—
From God's heart torn, rootless to man's they cling.

3. Faith remains as of old the condition of the highest life. To the prophet the supreme idea of life is safety, preservation from peril. To the Apostle the supreme idea is entire devotion to the will of God. He alone *lives* who can, in his measure, say after Christ, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." It is that life which a man shall live who has, and maintains, a living faith in God. And nothing else but faith can possibly inspire or sustain that life. A living faith maintains the higher life of righteousness, and the higher life of righteousness upholds, and ever reinvigorates, the living faith. Faith cannot but work out righteousness. Righteousness cannot but make demands that ennoble faith.

(1) We are not to suppose that faith is a supernatural faculty which we cannot exercise until it has been imparted to us by God in some mysterious manner. Faith is of course God's gift, but it is bestowed upon us just as naturally as memory is bestowed, or the gift of reason. It is one of the normal faculties of our manhood, for the exercise of which we are responsible. Were it not so, Christ could never have upbraided His disciples with their unbelief. The arguments used to present faith in any other light rest largely on a mistaken interpretation of Eph. ii. 8. It is salvation, not faith, which is declared in that verse to be "the gift of God."

¶ Perhaps if God's existence had been one of those things of which formal proof could be given to the world, the acknowledged fact would have lost its interest. It would have killed individual inquiry. . . . We should have lost all those touching and noble associations which gather round the name of faith, and should have had instead a cold science—common property, and so appropriated by none. As it is, each man has to prove the fact for himself. It is the great adventure, the great romance of every soul—this finding of God. Though so many travellers have crossed the ocean before us, and bear witness of the glorious

continent beyond, each soul for itself has to repeat the work of a Columbus, and discover God afresh. And this can indeed be done; but intellectual argument is not the sole nor the main means of apprehension. At best it prepares the way. Moral purification is equally necessary. Then spiritual effort, determined, concentrated, renewed in spite of failure—calm and strong prayers in the Name of Christ—enable the believer to say, like Jacob after he had wrestled with the Angel,—"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."[1]

(2) Christian faith is an attitude of the soul which wholly honours God. It takes Him simply and implicitly at His word. It rests upon His promises. It asks no questions. The fact that God has spoken is sufficient; the soul trusts, and in its trust is again at peace with God. Man's oneness with God was ruptured at first by unbelief. It was through the door of doubt that sin entered into the world, and death by sin. "Yea; hath God said—?" Faith reverses the subtle whisper of the tempter and trustfully accepts the word of the Living God—"Yea; God hath said"; thus faith speaks, and there faith rests.

¶ The late Master of Balliol (Dr. Jowett) asked the question, "Is it possible to feel a personal attachment to Christ such as is described by Thomas à Kempis? I think that it is impossible, and contrary to human nature, that we should be able to concentrate our thoughts on a person scarcely known to us, who lived 1800 years ago." Discipular experience from St. Paul downwards, through the centuries, acknowledges that it is possible, and finds the experience is proportionate to the culture of the spiritual nature and the enjoyment of the atmosphere of God and the Christ, who is at the centre of it. The testimony of the centuries corroborates Dr. Dale's view, "that faith in Christ is trust in a Person, not belief in a book; that the ultimate foundation of faith is personal knowledge of Christ, and its originating cause the personal testimony of those who in our own time, and before it, have trusted in Christ and have found their faith verified in spiritual experience." This statement is true to the heart of things and to the fundamental elements of spiritual and discipular experience. Christ is as real to the Christian experience as the air we breathe.[2]

(3) It is by such faith that men live. The life of our spirits

[1] A. J. Mason, *The Faith of the Gospel.*
[2] D. Butler, *Thomas à Kempis*, 75.

is a gift from God, the Father of spirits, and He has chosen to declare that unless we trust to Him for life, and ask Him for life, He will not bestow it upon us. The life of our bodies He in His mercy keeps up, although we forget Him; the life of our souls He will not keep up; therefore, for the sake of our spirits, even more than of our bodies, we must live by faith. If we wish to be loving, pure, manly, noble, we must ask these excellent gifts of God, who is Himself infinite love and purity, wisdom and nobleness. If we wish for everlasting life, from whom can we obtain it but from God, who is the fulness of eternal life itself? If we wish for forgiveness for our faults and failings, where are we to get it but from God, who is boundless love and pity, and who has revealed to us His boundless love and pity in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world? And to go a step farther; it is by faith in Christ we must live—in Christ, a man like ourselves, yet God blessed for ever. For it is a certain truth, that men cannot believe in God or trust in Him unless they can think of Him as a man. This was the reason why the poor heathen made themselves idols in the form of men, that they might have something like themselves to worship; and those among them who would not worship idols almost always ended in fancying that God was either a mere notion or a mere part of this world, or else that He sat up in heaven neither knowing nor caring what happened upon earth. But we, to whom God has given the glorious news of His gospel, have the very Person to worship whom all the heathen were searching after and could not find—one who is "very God," infinite in love, wisdom, and strength, and yet "very man," made in all points like ourselves, but without sin; so that we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who is able to help those who are tempted, because He was Himself tempted like us, and overcame by the strength of His own perfect will, of His own perfect faith. By trusting in Him, and acknowledging Him in every thought and action of our lives, we shall be safe; for it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

¶ Tolstoy had decided that for him at least life was simply not possible without faith. And by the logic of the heart he moved up to that position which Pater, by a curiously similar process, attained: that since there are certain presuppositions,

postulates, beliefs, without which a man simply cannot live, is not this a presumption that these presuppositions, postulates, beliefs, do signify the permanent, universal truth?

"I had only to know God, and I lived: I had only to forget Him, not to believe in Him, and I died. What was this discouragement and revival? I do not live when I lose faith in the existence of a God; I should long ago have killed myself if I had not had a dim hope of finding Him. I only really live when I feel, and seek Him. What more then do I ask? And a voice seemed to cry within me, 'This is He, He without whom there is no life! To know God and to live are One. God is Life! Live to seek God and life will not be without Him.' And stronger than ever rose up life within and around me, and the light that then shone never left me again."[1]

(4) It is by such faith that men endure. Faith is an attitude of the soul which is instinct with tremendous moral power. It is an energizing principle of such potency that where it operates the whole current of the life is changed. It fills the soul with a new inspiration. It uplifts the most sordid. It emboldens the most timorous. It banishes the fear of the craven and slays the lust of the profligate. It impels the slothful to a life of holy activity, and sends the most selfish forth into the world in self-forgetting service. Let faith live in a human heart, and there is nothing man will fear, nothing he dare not attempt. All things are possible to him that believeth. Let a statesman only believe in his cause and there is no toil that he will not endure, no ridicule that he will not brave, no opposition that he will dread to encounter. His faith is able to transform his whole character. And when a man from the depths of a sincere heart can say, with St. Paul, "I believe God," his creed is no impotent shibboleth, but an imprisoned energy in the soul, a moral dynamic, which will change his whole life. Potentially he is already one of God's heroes, one of that noble roll whose deeds are written on the sacred page, "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. xi. 33, 34).

By faith men endure in the midst of the greatest troubles

[1] J. A. Hutton, *Pilgrims in the Region of Faith*, 143.

and calamities. They so confide in the righteous God and in His declared promises, they remain so entirely loyal to the heavenly vision and hope which are beyond the ken of the natural man, that they are secretly strengthened in the darkest hours to hold fast their integrity. Faith in God means confidence in Him, fellowship with Him, devotion to Him; and such whole-hearted trust is the inspiration and guarantee of highest character, even when the stress and strain of life are most severe.

> God! Thou art love! I build my faith on that.
> Even as I watch beside Thy tortured child
> Unconscious whose hot tears fall fast by him,
> So doth Thy right hand guide us through the world
> Wherein we stumble. . . .
> I know Thee, who hast kept my path, and made
> Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
> So that it reached me like a solemn joy;
> It were too strange that I should doubt Thy love.[1]

[1] Browning, *Paracelsus*.

The City Without Walls.

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THE CITY WITHOUT WALLS.

Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein. For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her.—Zech. ii. 4, 5.

THE prophet Zechariah lived in a time of discouragement and distress. It was that pathetic yet heroic crisis in the national history when a remnant of Israel had returned from the long captivity in Babylon. Few if any of them had ever seen Jerusalem. They had been born in exile; but their fathers had told them of the dear Homeland, and they had been dreaming of it and yearning for it all their days; and now at length in the providence of God they were brought back. They had travelled across the desert in high hope, eager to see the land of their dreams and the Holy City and the encircling mountains; but their arrival was a cruel disillusionment. They found Jerusalem a desolation and her Temple a ruin; and they had to face the task of reconstruction.

At the best it would have been a heavy task, but for that weak remnant it was overpowering. They had been bondsmen all their days, and the yoke had crushed them. Their spirit was broken, and their poor souls fainted in face of an ordeal which demanded not only a strong hand but, even more, a stout heart. It was a perilous crisis, and their supreme need, if ever they would be a nation again, was a brave leader who should rally them, inspire them with faith and hope, and nerve them to the work. And he appeared. In the providence of God the time always brings the man; and the man at that crisis was the prophet Zechariah.

His message was a call to faith in God and to courageous endeavour. Expect great things from God: attempt great things

for God. And it did not fail. The people's hearts leaped to the challenge, and they girded themselves to the work. Their purpose was to rebuild and restore Jerusalem; but the prophet had a larger ideal. The work was begun. A surveyor had gone forth with his measuring line to map out the ancient site—the circle of the walls, the lie of the streets, and the position of the houses —that the city might be rebuilt on the old scale and the old design. That was their ideal reconstruction; but it was not Zechariah's.

He saw the surveyor at work, and a message came to him from the Lord. By the prophet's side there stood an angel-interpreter, just as Virgil or Beatrice stood beside Dante in his visions; and when another angel appeared upon the scene, the interpreter bade him run and stop the young man with the measuring line, and for this reason: the Jerusalem of the future was not to be rebuilt on the same lines as the Jerusalem of the past; no measurements would be needed; for the new city was to be built upon a larger scale, to make room for the large increase of its citizens; it was to lie open like an unwalled town, capable of indefinite expansion; and as for defences, stone walls would not be needed, for Jehovah Himself would be a wall of fire round about, and His glorious Presence would dwell within the city. Observe the fine mingling of the outward and the inward. The material fabric is not to be dissolved into a mere symbol or picture; there is to be a city and it is to be inhabited by a multitude of men and cattle; but the material fabric is to be spiritualized, the circumference a wall of fire, the centre Jehovah's Presence in glory; matter and spirit, human and Divine, welded into one corporate whole. As we follow the track of the prophet's thought, we catch already a glimpse of the shining climax to which it leads.

The prophet's vision serves to bring into prominence two great ideas regarding the City of God—

I. Its Expansion.

II. Its Security.

I.

The Expansion of the City.

"Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls."

Surely there is great boldness of faith underlying this promise. A city without a wall was unknown in the prophet's time, and it is only in recent times that by the creation of large countries with common sentiments and interests it has become an actual fact. For many centuries the very idea of a city was that of a walled space, the centre of a district, where men could flee for refuge when the enemy scoured the open country. Within these walls were found the sanctuary where men worshipped their God and the fortresses where they resisted the last attack of their foes. For a man to believe that God would be present with His people in such a living sense that the common material defences would be superseded was a supreme act of faith. There is splendid audacity in the thought, but we are not strong enough even now to accept it in all its fulness. It is an ideal which worldly common sense regards with scorn as the mere play of religious fancy.

¶ Faith realizes the city that is not yet built, grasps coming events as though they were already present, finds strong bulwarks, stately palaces, and the very city of God where other eyes see very little except ruins. It is the grand secret of Faith, her prerogative, that the better things which are going to be, the glories which are only promised, the Divine creations still afar off, are to her as real and solid as the ground under her feet or the fact of God Himself.[1]

1. The young man with the measuring line represents the narrow and mechanical interpretation of prophecy which led to sad disappointments and grievous loss in the history of Judaism, and is by no means extinct among us now. For it is a tendency in human nature to imagine that we can apply our human measurements to God's plan and purpose. Those Jewish exiles imagined that the future was simply to reproduce the past; the Jerusalem they had in their minds was the strong fortress which

[1] J. G. Greenhough, *The Cross in Modern Life*, 150.

could resist attack, the guardian of the nation's throne and altar, wherein Israel might dwell secure from the heathen world outside. On these lines, then, the city was to be measured out; the first business was to see what should be the breadth thereof and what should be the length thereof.

There are in every community men of mathematical mind, who lay great stress on the statistics of a subject. If they hear of a city they wish at once to know its exact size and population. That is good in its place, it checks mere dreaming and limits unbridled imagination; but there are facts to which figures do scant justice and forces that cannot be imprisoned in a definite formula. When it is a matter of God's presence, our small measurements are put to shame.

¶ All written or writable law respecting the arts is for the childish and ignorant; in the beginning of teaching, it is possible to say that this or that must or must not be done; and laws of colour and shade may be taught, as laws of harmony are to the young scholar in music. But the moment a man begins to be anything deserving the name of an artist, all this teachable law has become a matter of course with him, and if, thenceforth, he boast himself anywise in the law, or pretend that he lives and works by it, it is a sure sign that he is merely tithing cummin, and that there is no true art nor religion in him. For the true artist has that inspiration in him which is above all law, or rather which is continually working out such magnificent and perfect obedience to supreme law, as can in nowise be rendered by line and rule. There are more laws perceived and fulfilled in the single stroke of a great workman, than could be written in a volume. His science is inexpressibly subtle, directly taught him by his Maker, not in any wise communicable or imitable. Neither can any written or definitely observable laws enable us to do any great thing. It is possible, by measuring and administering quantities of colour, to paint a room wall so that it shall not hurt the eye; but there are no laws by observing which we can become Titians. It is possible so to measure and administer syllables as to construct harmonious verse; but there are no laws by which we can write Iliads. Out of the poem or the picture, once produced, men may elicit laws by the volume, and study them with advantage, to the better understanding of the existing poem or picture; but no more write or paint another, than by discovering laws of vegetation they can make a tree to grow. And therefore, wheresoever we find the system and

formality of rules much dwelt upon, and spoken of as anything else than a help for children, there we may be sure that noble art is not even understood, far less reached.[1]

2. The last thing that Zechariah wished was to discourage and hinder the rebuilding of the material walls of the ruined city. The very life of Jerusalem depended on the wall; the patriotic Nehemiah and his helpers had to combine the use of sword and trowel in order to complete the fortifications. The Jews at this time had many troublesome neighbours, and to ensure a peaceful place on the earth it must be enclosed and protected by a well-built wall. The angel was sent forth, not to prevent the young man from accomplishing his task, but to remind him of the greatness of Israel's spiritual ideal—not to tell him that his present project was altogether futile, but to show him that any reconstruction engaged in at that time was only the Divine foreshadowing of a far more glorious destiny. The surveyor's task, indeed, could not thus be set aside. It was the one pressing necessity of the hour; and no dreams of a possible increase of population in the future could justify them in neglecting it. Every generation, it is true, has a clear duty towards the future, even though, as some retort, posterity has done nothing for us. Still, the present duty must always have the prior consideration; and to suggest that because of some problematic increase of population, municipal corporations, in any age, should provide, not simply for the present necessity, but for future possibilities as well, is nothing better than the proverbial half-truth, which is never independent of some necessary qualification. Israel could well afford to peer into the future and think of the greatness of her coming destiny; but the present duty of the returned exiles was clear and urgent. It was not to arrest the youthful surveyor in his efforts to map out the city walls, but to begin at once the work of restoration, that, having secured a firm footing in the land of their fathers, they might be ready for all eventualities.

¶ The interest of this Vision is not only historical. For ourselves it has an abiding doctrinal value. It is a lesson in the method of applying prophecy to the future. How much it is needed we must feel as we remember the readiness of men among ourselves to construct the Church of God upon the lines His own

[1] Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, vol. iii. chap. ii. § 89.

hand drew for our fathers, and to raise again the bulwarks behind which they sufficiently sheltered His shrine. Whether these ancient and sacred defences be dogmas or institutions, we have no right, God tells us, to cramp behind them His powers for the future. And the great men whom He raises to remind us of this, and to prevent by their ministry the timid measurements of the zealous but servile spirits who would confine everything to the exact letter of ancient Scripture—are they any less His angels to us than those ministering spirits whom Zechariah beheld preventing the narrow measures of the poor apprentice of his dream?[1]

3. But while Zechariah, like a wise teacher, was intensely interested in the plans of the builders, he at the same time tried to fire their imagination by emphasizing the greatness of Israel's calling. As the people of Jehovah, the nation was destined to hand on to future ages, not a political economy, but a religion. She was summoned to hold aloft the torch of revelation, and thus fulfil the part of a great missionary people. Her ideal was not political, but religious. She was not an empire, but a Church.

God's purpose was wider than men imagined; it could no longer be contained within the boundaries which sufficed for earlier needs; God's city must be built without walls. There must be ample room for expansion, space for more citizens, for a wider franchise, for a bolder confidence in the future. And lest any man should be afraid to welcome this larger view, Jehovah Himself promised the defence of His encircling guard and the illumination of His abiding presence. Here, in this vision of Zechariah, we have presented to us in vivid contrast the rival elements in the faith of Israel—the temper which was always in favour of setting up stone walls and living within them, and the temper which refused to be confined, and looked beyond and trusted God. These elements run deep in human nature; they need not be rivals, if we can once learn how to be both loyal to the past and open-minded towards the future, and how to maintain the material fabric, the outward institutions, for spiritual ends.

¶ You cannot measure anything that God builds. You cannot measure the Church, the Church of Christ. It is easy to find out how many nominal Christians there are. Government tables will do that for you, or a little map painted in black here and in red

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of The Twelve Prophets*, ii. 290.

there and in gold there, and you think you have got it. God does not make nominal Christians. He has nothing to do with that work, so you can measure and count them. But the Church of Christ —you have to find out how much self-forgetting, Christlike fervour, generosity, enthusiasm, Christlike patience, zeal, there are; these give you the extent of the Saviour's kingdom, and you cannot measure them. You might as well attempt to tabulate a martyr's zeal, or keep a ledger account of a mother's love. Two or three hundred years ago a little ship crossed the Atlantic, the *Mayflower*. People would not venture to cross the Atlantic in such a tub to-day. You could have swung it up on the after-deck of one of the latest Cunard steamers without having appreciably added to the freight. That little ship carried in its hold a company of men and women who had left home and fatherland for Jesus' name, carried moral forces enough to lay the foundation of the mightiest republic the world has ever seen. Nobody could measure that; it was God's building.[1]

4. The dream of Zechariah never came to pass. Jerusalem was rebuilt, but she never attained her former greatness and glory. Her after-history was a succession of disasters and humiliations. Ere many generations elapsed, she was conquered by the Greeks; then she fell under the Roman dominion; and finally she was devastated by the army of Titus and her citizens were dispersed over the face of the earth.

In the century after Zechariah, we find Ezra organizing the Jewish community on the most exclusive principles, and Nehemiah setting to work at once to repair the walls of Jerusalem, and to collect the people within them for protection. So far from any thought of welcome for converted Gentiles, the main object of the religious leaders was to safeguard the community from heathen surroundings. Consolidation rather than expansion was the supreme necessity, if the Jewish faith and nation were to survive at all. In the centuries which followed, as the Persians succeeded to the Babylonians, and the Persians again gave place to the successors of Alexander, and Syria and Egypt fell under changing powers, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile to the struggling little nation in Jerusalem—during this period the main religious tendencies were making for the preservation rather than the enlargement of the distinctive faith and

[1] J. G. Greenhough, *The Cross in Modern Life*, 158.

practice of Judaism. It was the period when the faithful turned to the past for encouragement and idealized their ancient history, and studied the writings of the prophets, annotated and added to them, in a wistful effort to adjust their belief in God's particular providence to the non-fulfilment of His promise.

At last, in the second century B.C., we come to the Book of Daniel, and what do we find? A life-and-death struggle going on between loyal Israelites and a wanton heathen persecutor of their religion. Death any day rather than eat the heathen meat, or profane the Sabbath, or sacrifice to idols, or neglect the hours of prayer! The spirit of martyrs and confessors is abroad, and it is no narrow creed that such men champion. They have their wide outlook, their grasp of principles. They are convinced that no heathen powers can in the end prevail against God, that the truth is bound to triumph and the Kingdom of God to be established. And they were bold enough to fix a date; in three and a half years deliverance would come and the reign of the holy people of God begin. So in former days the prophets had again and again expected that a great act of salvation was at hand, to be followed at once by the dawn of a glorious day. But no! it was not to be. The hour was not yet come.

5. And yet Jerusalem did spread out her scattered settlements into the great world. The synagogue was planted in the chief cities of the Roman Empire; and just in proportion as the Jews were true to the higher elements of their faith they sent forth truths of priceless value and imperishable influence. They were forced out into the great world, and wherever they went they carried their religion with them; and notwithstanding their hard legalism and exclusive temper the nobility and attraction of that religion manifested itself. The patriotic saintly men scattered through foreign lands thought with tenderness of Jerusalem as the city of their God and the home of their religion, but many of them began to realize that the true Zion is not the soil or the walls of an earthly city but the living truth, the glorious revelation from God. From this point of view, the prophecy received a very real fulfilment. Jerusalem did indeed break its barriers; the life inspired by prophets and regulated by lawgivers overspread the world, and became one of the most important factors in its

religious life. Churches and sects may struggle, as they do to-day, for the soil of the ancient city, fighting with vulgar fanaticism for "the sacred places," but the city of God, "Jerusalem the golden," is otherwhere; it is found wherever men are fighting for true liberty, personal purity, and social righteousness.

¶ When we try to apply our reason to the whence and the whither of the cosmos, to the analysis of time and change, reason and imagination fail. But if neither is more intelligible than the other, that which looks forward to a consummation appears to correspond more with the other powers of developed manhood. Both feeling and will demand that life as we know it shall have a consummation; both feeling and will demand that human history as we know it shall work toward that consummation. This was the great strength of the Hebrew prophet; God had a purpose in history; it was a purpose that man could partly understand; it was a purpose that man, if he would, could wholly co-operate with; it was in the co-operation of man and God that the purpose was to be accomplished. If there be a Divine purpose in history, insight into the meaning and survival value of events is the same thing as foresight into the result of those events. Dr. Edward Caird said that with the Hebrew prophets insight was foresight. But it is not alone of the Hebrew prophet that this is true; the man who can look about him to-day, and see with penetrating eye those elements in the life of his community which have survival value, can, if there be purpose in history, sketch the future. The imagery of his sketch may be crude, as in Jewish prophecy, but just in so far as his insight is true, his vision of future events will symbolize truth. The crudeness of the symbol will not alter the inner certainty that it sets forth.[1]

6. Out of that rebuilt Jerusalem came the Christian faith. Near the walls of Jerusalem was reared the Christian cross. From the cross of Christ issued a power which is most aptly and beautifully described by the very words of this prophet. How could the Christian religion be better described than by saying that it is a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst? And as that new faith came out of the old, the nations of the earth were gathered to it as Zechariah saw—not gathered to Judaism, but gathered to the transformed Judaism of the cross of Christ.

Our Lord advances far beyond Jerusalem and Gerizim and Hermon and Tyre and Sidon, and makes the measurements of His

[1] *The Practice of Christianity*, 100.

Kingdom as wide as the world: "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." He looks beyond the Hebrew races scattered abroad in every nation under heaven, and He says, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." And He gives the word of command on Olivet, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

¶ Bishop Montgomery has said, "the Body of Christ is a torso." Only when the glory and honour of all nations are brought into the Kingdom will the true greatness of the Kingdom be known. A meeting of devout Christians a little while ago was startled to hear a well-known missionary say something like this: "What are the characteristic virtues of a converted Englishman? Honesty, manliness, truthfulness, trustworthiness. And what are the characteristic virtues of the converted Hindu? They are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." But what will be the result when the mystical and spiritual nations of the East, and the affectionate and childlike peoples of Africa, are quickened by contact with the perfection of their own virtues in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth? Inevitably the whole Church will be filled with a new spirit of devotion and selflessness. Stage by stage, then, the Church must build itself up, its work at home rendering possible more work abroad, and the work abroad bringing new inspiration for the work at home; until at last the one Purpose of God will govern all mankind, and the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ is made known.[1]

7. We may still look forward to the building and expansion of Jerusalem. Let us beware of our short-sighted views of God's purposes; our human measurements are useless and misleading. The narrow limitations of an older day will not be sufficient for the present or the future. We must have room to expand and grow; we must be large and generous in our welcome to the truth as it unfolds before us. Even if the old defences are inadequate, we will have no fear, but will rather address ourselves to our high task with a firm confidence in God's protection of God's own cause, in the wall of fire around, in the glory which abides within.

[1] W. Temple, in *Foundations*, 358.

¶ The Christian religion is not a revolutionary attempt to sweep away all barriers and abolish all distinctions, but in its nature it is spiritual, diffusing itself as an atmosphere and refusing to be confined within the limits of any "chosen people." In connexion with the various Churches there has been much wall-building; a needful operation at times, but not the highest order of architecture. Some minds are easily provoked to build a separating wall. If, however, any Church could succeed in making itself absolutely a sect, cutting itself off completely from the large universal currents of life, it would die; its strong wall would enclose not a living city but a silent tomb. The Church can open wide her gates just in so far as she possesses the fearless expansive life which comes from the indwelling God.[1]

¶ The forgiving Love of God goes freely forth to all men through the Cross, and Pardon and Salvation may be had by *all* without money and without price. This Gospel of the Grace of God needs to be proclaimed in all its Divine freeness and fulness, so that our faith and hope may be in God, and not in any measure in ourselves. But we need to remember that it is *in His Kingdom* that God so comes to us, and that we can only make the pardon offered a reality to ourselves, or find the Salvation, as we become the loyal members of God's Kingdom, and make the Divine purpose that of our individual lives. . . . And, whether we think of the Kingdom and membership in it here and hereafter, or of the Family of God and our place as children therein, we cannot but see that both call us to a life of love and unselfish devotion to the cause of God in the world. We cannot be the members of a Kingdom of God while we live in a self-regarding isolation; and we cannot be the children of God if we are not moved by the spirit of brotherhood in relation to the other members of His great family, whether they have as yet come home to the Father, or are still wandering in the darkness and sorrow of ignorance and sin. We cannot be the members of that Kingdom, to bring in which Christ died, if we do not seek, in the spirit of Jesus, to extend it over all the world, and over life in all its aspects and interests, while at the same time we limit not our thoughts to earth, but seek to be made fit, and to make others fit, for membership in that Eternal Kingdom, in which alone man's permanent good can be found.[2]

[1] W. G. Jordan, *Prophetic Ideas and Ideals*, 297.
[2] W. L. Walker, *The Cross and the Kingdom*, 279.

II.

The Security of the City.

"I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about."

The metaphor is that of an army or a company of travellers spending the night in a place infested with beasts of prey. The halt is made where fuel is easily procurable, and there a circle of fires is drawn round the encampment. Away in the outer darkness hungry baffled forms may be seen moving to and fro, but they dare not venture nigh. A ring of flame is a wall of salvation.

1. Here is safety from all outward enemies. As long as the city obeyed and trusted God it was impregnable, though all the nations stood round about it, like dogs round a sheep. The fulfilment of the promise has passed over, with all the rest that characterized Israel's position, to the Christian Church, and to-day, in the midst of all the agitations of opinion, and all the vauntings of men about an effete Christianity and dead churches, it is as true as ever it was that the living Church of God is eternal. If it had not been that there was a God as a wall of fire round about the Church, it would have been wiped off the face of the earth long ago. If nothing else had killed it the faults of its members would have done so. The continuance of the Church is a perpetual miracle, when we take into account the weakness, and the errors, and the follies, and the stupidities, and the narrownesses, and the sins of the people who in any given day represent it. That it should stand at all, and that it should conquer, seems to be as plain a demonstration of the present working of God as is the existence still, as a separate individuality amongst the peoples of the earth, of His ancient people, the Jews.

When the Romans had cast a torch into the Temple, and the streets of the city were running with blood, what had become of Zechariah's dream of a wall of fire round about her? Then can the Divine fire be quenched? Yes. And who quenched it? Not the Romans, but the people that lived within that flaming

rampart. The apparent failure of the promise carries the lesson for churches and individuals to-day, that in spite of such glowing predictions, there may again sound the voice that the legend says was heard within the Temple on the night before Jerusalem fell: "Let us depart," and there was a rustling of unseen wings, and on the morrow the legionaries were in the shrine. "If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

2. But there is inward defence too. "A radiance will I become in her midst." It was that symbolic Light that spoke of the special presence of God, and went with the children of Israel in their wanderings, and sat between the Cherubim. There was no "Shechinah," as it is technically called, in that second Temple. But yet the prophet says, "The glory"—the actual Presence of God—"shall be in the midst of her," and the meaning of that great promise is taught us by the very last vision in the New Testament, in which the Seer of the Apocalypse says, "The glory of God did lighten it (evidently quoting Zechariah), and the Lamb is the light thereof." So the city is lit as by one central glow of radiance that flashes its beams into every corner, and therefore "there shall be no night there."

The God who wards off all enemies gives light and warmth to those within the circle of His embracing love. It was a happy thing for the shepherds that the fires which they lighted to drive away beasts of prey also afforded to themselves a cheerful light and a comforting blaze. Even so it is that, while God's light is a terror to the impure, it is a joy to the good. The first thing created was light; and Christ came, as the Light of the world, to shed "a marvellous light" over its darkness and sin. Night and darkness flee at His coming. "In thy light," says the Psalmist, "shall we see light." And one of the most delicate of Scotch "Paraphrases" has this stanza—

> Our hearts, if God we seek to know,
> Shall know Him, and rejoice;
> His coming like the morn shall be,
> Like morning songs His voice.

3. The only means by which a Christian community can fulfil its function, and be the light of the world, is by having the presence of God, in no metaphor, the actual presence of the

illuminating Spirit, in its midst. If it has not that, it may have anything and everything else—wealth, culture, learning, eloquence, influence in the world—but all is of no use; it will be darkness. We are light only in proportion as we are "light in the Lord." As long as we, as communities, keep our hearts in touch with Him, so long do we shine. Break the contact, and the light fades and flickers out.

The ancient Israelite would hardly have dared to take these great words as personal. They applied to the country and the city, but not to the individual; but since Christ came, and since in the faith of Christ we learnt the value of the individual, we have come, and rightly come, to take these great prophetic ideas as personal experiences; and every man who is a Christian, who has faith in Jesus Christ, may have the wall of fire round about him and the Glory in the midst. And when we take the words in this personal sense, we cannot help feeling how aptly and even exquisitely they describe the relation between the soul and God. How could those two complementary facts, the transcendence and the immanence of God, be more suitably described than by this image? The wall of fire round about represents the transcendence, and the Glory in the midst represents the immanence of God. The inward life is of this character, that by the faith of Christ your inward being becomes filled with God. The Spirit of God dwells there. Harmony, purity, and love are within you. And that inward light becomes a guidance and a power in every action of the day. You do not walk at random; you are led. Whatever the world around you may be, within you there is peace. The Kingdom of God is established there.

¶ Each life lies overshadowed, enfolded, embosomed in the Spiritual Whole which is God; eternity is our home; we "cannot drift beyond His love and care";

> The eternal God is thy refuge,
> And underneath are the everlasting arms.

That is the Gospel of the transcendent God. Within each life the divine Spirit dwells; the divine eternal Life is present, lifting us up to the heights, bringing our visions to pass, urging us to be "perfect even as your Father is perfect"; a Spirit guiding us "into all the truth," as a lamp within the breast; the promise and potency of all we long and pray for as dearest and most

precious; the pledge of immortality amid mortality, of abundant life through every tribulation, and out of any death. That is the Gospel of the divine immanence.[1]

¶ Conscience, as we all know, is liable to perversion, to morbid exaggerations, to partial insensibility, to twists and crotchets of all sorts, and itself needs correction by various external standards. Conscience, therefore, can never be our supreme and absolute guide. . . . That individual and immediate guidance, in which we recognize that "the finger of God is come unto us," seems to come in as it were to complete and perfect the work rough-hewn by morality and conscience. We may liken the laws of our country to the cliffs of our island, over which we rarely feel ourselves in any danger of falling; the moral standard of our social circle to the beaten highway road which we can hardly miss. Our own conscience would then be represented by a fence by which some parts of the country are enclosed for each one, the road itself at times barred and narrowed. And that Divine guidance of which I am speaking could be typified only by the pressure of a hand upon ours, leading us gently to step to the right or to the left, to pause or to go forward, in a manner intended for and understood by ourselves alone.[2]

¶ The Deism that is now passing away said, God is not here, God is beyond—beyond everything we know. He is outside of His universe. He is in the region of the unknown; in the emptiness beyond. He does not declare Himself in nature nor in history. And having defined Him negatively as against the finite, we naturally, nay inevitably, pronounce Him to be unknown. Of course, if thus conceived, He is unknown and unknowable; the very hypothesis places Him beyond the knowable. Then we condemn reason for not being able to know what we have just defined as unknowable.

Now, however, owing in part to our great poets, who are also our greatest philosophers, such as Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson, owing to Goethe and the great philosophical idealists, we are revising our view of God; we are feeling our way towards the conception of God as immanent in nature and in the mind of man. We are admitting the natural and moral universe into the witness-box to strengthen the testimony of the sacred Book; and once more we are venturing to say that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork."

It seems to me that our most recent theology in doing this is simply rising to the demands that the religious spirit has always

[1] E. W. Lewis, in *Getting Together*, 73.

[2] Caroline Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds*, 31.

made. For, of course, the task of theology is only to interpret religion, to explain man's relation to his God; and theology is as different from religion itself as astronomy from the stars. The starry system is a fact; astronomy is the attempt at the explanation of it. Religion is also a fact, the living force in history; theology is the explanation of that fact, or the attempted explanation. Now the religious spirit always gives genuine significance to the notion that God is omnipresent; for the trustful spirit finds God everywhere. Yea, it finds God in the midst of the sorrows and the disasters of life, even amongst the tragedies of sin. And when theology rises to the dignity of its task it also will seek God everywhere. If it does not it is not faithful to the subject which it is its problem to explain.[1]

[1] Sir Henry Jones, *Social Powers*, 102.

A Brand Plucked out of the Fire.

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A Brand Plucked out of the Fire.

And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?—Zech. iii. 1, 2.

The Israelites were engaged in rebuilding the Temple, but notwithstanding their own zeal and earnestness, and the ostensible permission and encouragement of the Babylonian king, they found themselves making little progress. They were being continually thwarted. The work halted in their hands. We can well imagine the thoughts which may have troubled many at so unexpected an event. Had then God indeed cast them off? Would the Lord no more dwell upon Mount Zion? Was it a vain effort to attempt to raise from its ruins their holy place? Meditations like these may well have swept across their minds, and made their souls disquieted within them. And now what is the message from the Lord? It comes in a vision to Zechariah. In this vision is laid bare the whole secret of the hindrances which so bowed the hearts of the people. In this they are led to trace the radical cause of all their difficulties. The Jewish Church and nation are suitably represented in the person of the high priest. Their moral condition contaminated with past idolatry, and their struggling against opposition to rebuild the Temple, is with equal precision denoted by the foul garments of the high priest and the close neighbourhood of Satan. Then follows the consolation. Satan is rebuked; the inglorious apparel is taken away, the mitre set upon Joshua's head, and a sublime promise added, that if Joshua, having been thus readorned, shall discharge his office faithfully, he shall retain a perpetual priesthood; if, in other words, the Israelites would walk in God's law, they should never be rejected.

I.

The Accused.

"He shewed me Joshua the high priest."

1. This Joshua was a leading figure of the period. In the contemporary prophet Haggai he is frequently mentioned. There we learn that he was the son of Jehosadak, and that he was closely associated with Zerubbabel in all the pious and patriotic undertakings of those days. The one, indeed, was the ecclesiastical and the other the civil head of the new community.

In Ezra and Nehemiah this Joshua is called Jeshua. His grandfather, Seraiah, who was high priest at the time of the capture of Jerusalem, was executed at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar, and his father Jehosadak was carried captive to Babylon, where Joshua was probably born. On the arrival of the caravan at Jerusalem, Joshua naturally took a leading part in the erection of the altar of burnt-offering, and in the laying of the foundations of the Temple.

2. When it is said that he was seen standing before the Lord, the first notion suggested by the words is that, as high priest, he was engaged in the duties of his sacred office; because to stand before the Lord is frequently mentioned in Scripture as the privilege of the priesthood. It is probable, however, that the image presented to the mind of the prophet was totally different. It was not in the Temple that Joshua seemed to him to be, but in the hall of judgment. To stand before the judge is a phrase used of the prisoner at the bar; and that this is its signification here is proved by the statement which follows—that Satan was standing at his right hand to accuse him; for this was the position of the prosecutor in a court of justice. And the same view is further supported by the fact that Joshua was clothed in filthy garments—a condition in which the high priest could, under no circumstances, have appeared before God in the service of his office, but which befits exactly the position of a criminal.

Josephus says that among the Jews persons who had to appear

at the bar of a judge as accused usually, on such occasions, were habited in black garments. The garments, however, in which Joshua was seen were not black, but filthy; they may have been originally white or splendid, but they were unclean, sordid, or befouled. Now, as clean and white garments betokened purity and righteousness, garments dirtied and defiled indicated the opposite—a state of humiliation, impurity, and guilt. The filthy garments, therefore, in which Joshua was attired indicated his being in a state of moral impurity and sinfulness. Unlike the worthy few in the Church at Sardis "who had not defiled their garments," that is, had kept themselves free and blameless, he had come under sin, and appeared before the Angel of the Lord as one encompassed with iniquity.

¶ Let a man persevere in prayer and watchfulness to the day of his death, yet he will never get to the bottom of his heart. Though he know more and more of himself as he becomes more conscientious and earnest, still the full manifestation of the secrets there lodged is reserved for another world. And at the last day who can tell the affright and horror of a man who lived to himself on earth, indulging his own evil will, following his own chance notions of truth and falsehood, shunning the cross and the reproach of Christ, when his eyes are at length opened before the throne of God, and all his innumerable sins, his habitual neglect of God, his abuse of his talents, his misapplication and waste of time, and the original unexplored sinfulness of his nature, are brought clearly and fully to his view? Nay, even to the true servants of Christ, the prospect is awful. "The righteous," we are told, "will scarcely be saved." Then will the good man undergo the full sight of his sins, which on earth he was labouring to obtain, and partly succeeded in obtaining, though life was not long enough to learn and subdue them all. Doubtless we must all endure that fierce and terrifying vision of our real selves, that last fiery trial of the soul before its acceptance, a spiritual agony and second death to all who are not then supported by the strength of Him who died to bring them safe through it, and in whom on earth they have believed.[1]

3. It was not, however, his own personal transgressions alone of which Joshua bore the guilt. He appears here as the representative of a guilty people. The filthy garments with which he is clothed are the sins of the community; and the charges urged

[1] J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, i. 48.

against him by Satan are its crimes and backslidings. The uncleanness of Israel which infests their representative before God is not defined. Some hold that it includes the guilt of Israel's idolatry. But they have to go back to Ezekiel for this. Zechariah nowhere mentions or feels the presence of idols among his people. The vision itself supplies a better explanation. Joshua's filthy garments are replaced by festal and official robes. He is warned to walk in the whole law of the Lord, ruling the Temple and guarding Jehovah's court. The uncleanness was the opposite of all this. It was not ethical failure: covetousness, greed, immorality. It was, as Haggai protested, the neglect of the Temple, and of the whole worship of Jehovah. If this be now removed, in all fidelity to the law, the high priest will have access to God, and the Messiah will come. The high priest himself will not be the Messiah—this dogma is left to a later age to frame. But before God he will be as one of the angels, and himself and his faithful priesthood omens of the Messiah. We need not linger on the significance of this for the place of the priesthood in later Judaism. Note how the high priest is already the religious representative of his people: their uncleanness is his; when he is pardoned and cleansed, the uncleanness of the land is purged away. In such a high priest Christian theology has seen the prototype of Christ.

¶ Heaven is not a place of sacrifice, and our Lord is no longer a Sacrificing Priest. He has "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever." But His Presence in the Holiest is a perpetual and effective presentation before God of the Sacrifice once offered, which is no less needful for our acceptance than the actual death upon the Cross. He has indeed "somewhat to offer" in His heavenly priesthood, for He offers Himself as representing to God man reconciled, and as claiming for man the right of access to the Divine Presence. He Himself, as He sits on the Throne, in the perfected and glorified Manhood which has been obedient unto death, is the living Propitiation for our sins, and the standing guarantee of acceptance to all "that draw near unto God through him."[1]

[1] H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, 43.

II.

The Accuser.

"And Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary."

1. The rôle played in this scene by Satan is similar to that ascribed to him in the Book of Job, where he appears in the court of Heaven, to minimize the merits of good men and to place their shortcomings in the worst of lights. So here he is the accuser who, with the skill of an advocate, urges the offences of which the people of God have been guilty and endeavours to secure their condemnation and rejection.

It has been contended that in such passages we have a conception of Satan out of accordance with the later representations of Scripture. Satan, it is said, is not here a fallen angel and an enemy of God, whose abode is in hell, but one of the sons of God, enjoying free access to the Divine Presence, and fulfilling a necessary, though perhaps a disagreeable, function in the Divine administration.

This, however, is a shallow view; because the part played by Satan both here and in Job is a thoroughly evil one. It is true that to expose sin may be praiseworthy work. It is the work of the prophet; an Amos, a Malachi, and a John the Baptist had to make manifest the exceeding sinfulness of the public crimes of their day, and drag into the light the hidden vices. In all ages this is the duty of the preacher; it was performed by a Chrysostom, a Savonarola, and an Andrewes; and in no country or city is it superfluous. The office of conscience itself is to accuse and condemn the sinner. Yet it does not follow that everyone is praiseworthy who undertakes the office of accuser. All depends on his motive. The prophets stigmatized sin because they were jealous for the honour of God; the true-hearted preacher awakens the conscience in order to save the soul; but it is possible to expose sin merely for the purpose of gloating over it. The shortcomings of good people may be held up to ridicule, not for the purpose of correcting them, but in order to prove that no such things as unselfishness and purity exist. There are those who are never so happy as when they have discovered something which

seems to prove that a profession of religion or high principle is only the mask under which a hypocrite is concealing his misdeeds. When God's work is making progress and its leaders are performing acts of heroism, such critics are silent; but, when any good cause shows signs of decline or any good man takes a false step, they seize upon the fact with avidity and publish it to all the winds of heaven. This is the spirit of the devil, and it is the one attributed in this passage to Satan.

¶ In a letter to his friend F. J. A. Hort, Maurice writes: "You think you do not find a distinct recognition of the devil's personality in my books. I am sorry if it is so. I am afraid I have been corrupted by speaking to a polite congregation. I do agree with my dear friend Charles Kingsley, and admire him for the boldness with which he has said that the devil is shamming dead, but that he never was busier than now. I do not know what he is by theological arguments, but I know by what I feel. I am sure there is one near me accusing God and my brethren to me. He is not myself; I should go mad if I thought he was. He is near my neighbours; I am sure he is not identical with my neighbours. I must hate them if I believed he was. But oh! most of all, I am horror-struck at the thought that we may confound him with God; the perfect darkness with the perfect light. I dare not deny that it is an evil will that tempts me; else I should begin to think evil is in God's creation, and is not the revolt from God, resistance to Him. If he is an evil will, he must, I think, be a person. The Word upholds his existence, not his evil. That is in himself; that is the mysterious, awful possibility implied in his being a will. I need scarcely say that I do not mean by this acknowledgment of an evil *spirit* that I acknowledge a *material* devil. But does any one?"

In a subsequent letter, Maurice relates that "Mr. Hall, the Baptist preacher, was once accosted by one of his *confrères*: 'Sir, do not you believe in the devil?' 'No, sir,' he answered; 'I believe in God. Do not you?' Now he had an intense feeling of the devil as his personal and constant enemy; but he kept his *belief* for his everlasting friend."[1]

¶ Between these two classes, of the happy and the heartless, there is a mediate order of men both unhappy and compassionate, who have become aware of another form of existence in the world, and a domain of zoology extremely difficult of vivisection—the diabolic. These men, of whom Byron, Burns, Goethe, and Carlyle are in modern days the chief, do not at all feel that the Nature

[1] *Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, ii. 21, 403.

they have to deal with expresses a Feast only; or that her mysteries of good and evil are reducible to a quite visible Kosmos, as they stand; but that there is another Kosmos, mostly invisible, yet perhaps tangible, and to be felt if not seen.

Without entering upon the question how men of this inferior quality of intellect become possessed either of the idea—or substance—of what they are in the habit of calling "the Devil"; nor even into the more definite historical question, "how men lived who did seriously believe in the Devil"—(that is to say, every saint and sinner who received a decent education between the first and the seventeenth centuries of the Christian era)—I will merely advise my own readers of one fact respecting the above-named writers—that *they*, at least, do not use the word "Devil" in any metaphorical, typical, or abstract sense, but—whether they believe or disbelieve in what they say—in a distinctly personal one: and farther, that the conceptions or imaginations of these persons, or any other such persons, greater or less, yet of their species—whether they are a mere condition of diseased brains, or a perception of really existent external forces,—are nevertheless real *Visions*, described by them "from the life," as literally and straightforwardly as ever any artist of Rotterdam painted a sot—or his pot of beer: and farther—even were we at once to grant that all these visions—as for instance Zechariah's, "I saw the Lord sitting on His Throne, and Satan standing at His right hand to resist Him," *are* nothing more than emanations of the unphosphated nervous matter—still, these states of delirium are an essential part of human natural history: and the species of human Animal subject to them, with the peculiar characters of the phantoms which result from its diseases of the brain, are a much more curious and important subject of science than that which principally occupies the scientific mind of modern days.[1]

2. This is the secret of the slow progress of Christ's Kingdom. "He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand." Who is this Joshua but the representative of Jesus, our great High Priest within the veil? The names "Joshua" and "Jesus" are identical, and, being interpreted, mean "Jehovah, the Saviour." When the Jews were struggling, amidst diverse hardships, to build up their Temple at Jerusalem, the prophet was taught the secret of the opposition they met with by being made to behold in vision the then head of the Israelitish Church, and Satan close by resisting

[1] Ruskin, *Deucalion*, vol. ii. chap. ii. § 21 (*Works*, xxvi. 344).

him. And this vision is the key which unlocks the secret of the entire history of the Christian Church. The cause of Christianity is the cause of Christ. He is, and has been throughout, as really involved in all that has been done; He has throughout been acting as really, though invisibly, as when He taught in the streets of Capernaum. And, even as beneath the outward instrumentality of apostles and preachers we are to trace and appreciate the unseen hand and the inaudible voice, of the high priest of our profession, so in the resistance of the heathen, in the cruelties heaped upon the martyrs, in the slow progress of the faith, we are to feel the presence and energy of the great fallen angel. It is from hell that the opposition comes. As it is Christ from His throne, in the light inaccessible, who animates the souls, and influences the hearts of His saints to do and suffer for His Name's sake, so is it the apostate seraph, from his lurid abode, who stirs up adversaries on every side.

¶ To Luther Satan was no mere influence or principle of evil, but a real personal foe—the prince of the powers of the air, the ruler of this world—against whom he, as a captain of the Lord's host, had to wage a terrible and constant conflict. The Diabolus of Bunyan's *Holy War*, the Apollyon of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, was to Luther also a mighty adversary of God's saints and of Christ, the Captain of our salvation.

If enemies abound and dangers are thickening, it is the Devil who is leading his hosts of evil against the cause of Christ. If there is a time of quiet and of prosperity, it may only be the craft of the Tempter, to cause want of earnestness and of vigilance.

Always, it is more of the Devil than of the Flesh and the World that Luther appears to speak in his spiritual warfare. It was so in his early struggles with sin and with self-righteousness, and in fighting his way to a position of peace and safety through faith in God's righteousness. It was so in the midst of the grand conflict with the potentates of this world, as when he steadfastly set his face to go to Worms, "though there were as many devils there as tiles on the roofs!" It was so in the evening of his life, when sickness and feebleness prevented his maintaining more active conflict for the cause of the truth.

It may be that, by dwelling upon the fact of the enmity of the devil and his angels, and allowing the idea of active personal conflict habitually to work in his imagination, Luther came to give an excessive prominence to this Satanic influence. The idea

may even have exerted at times a morbid effect upon him; amounting almost to mental disease, in the eyes of those who knew not the Scriptural ground for his belief, nor understood his spiritual experience. But the charge—that stories of Luther's conflicts are only proofs of a weakly superstitious or a fanatically diseased mind—comes with bad grace from those who not only ridicule all belief in the personal existence and agency of the devil, but who are unable also to understand Luther's belief in the existence and presence of God, in whose sight he ever lived, and wrote, and acted.

3. Satan's accusations were unfortunately true. Joshua could not refute them. He was actually clothed in filthy attire. The devil is generally a liar, but he was not a liar in this particular instance. That which the devil said was perfectly true. It is a grand thing when we are able to face the enemy and say, "You always were a liar, and you are a liar now"; but it is a terrible thing when we have to say, "The devil himself is speaking the truth for once." Joshua has not a word to say. He is perfectly silent. What can he say? Suppose he were to deny the charge. All that Satan would have to do would be to point at him with his finger, and say, "Look at these filthy garments." What could Joshua reply? And when Satan brings his charges against the sinner, what has the sinner to say? He himself proves that Satan is correct in everything that he says. Woe be unto the man when there is no one to speak up for him and he cannot speak for himself!

Satan stands at his right hand to resist him. In our language we should say that there is a social embodiment of opposition to goodness which that man has made for himself; he has created an atmosphere about his own life which is blighting to reforming efforts, and there is a social power which stands like a Satan, like an adversary, on his right hand, the hand of action, to paralyse it. Moreover, that sort of life puts itself in communication with great forces of evil, and altogether the man feels that a great overpowering adversary is against him. Before God he feels guilt, but no hope. Now what is there to be said to a man in this condition? He has no hope for himself, and says that no one who knows him has the least hope that he will ever be different. His garments are filthy, the devil is at his right hand, and God, so far

as he knows, is only his Judge. That is the difficulty, and it is fearful. Is there any hope?

¶ In fearful truth, the Presence and Power of Satan *is* here; in the world, with us, and within us, mock as you may; and the fight with him, for the time, sore, and widely unprosperous. Do not think I am speaking metaphorically or rhetorically, or with any other than literal and earnest meaning of words. Hear me, I pray you, therefore, for a little while, as earnestly as I speak.

Every faculty of man's soul, and every instinct of it by which he is meant to live, is exposed to its own special form of corruption; and whether within Man, or in the external world, there is a power or condition of temptation which is perpetually endeavouring to reduce every glory of his soul, and every power of his life, to such corruption as is possible to them. And the more beautiful they are, the more fearful is the death which is attached as penalty to their degradation. . . .

Now observe—I leave you to call this deceiving spirit what you like—or to theorize about it as you like. All that I desire you to recognize is the fact of its being here, and the need of its being fought with. If you take the Bible's account of it, or Dante's or Milton's, you will receive the image of it as a mighty spiritual creature, commanding others, and resisted by others. . . . If you take a modern rationalist's you will accept it for a mere treachery and want of vitality in our own moral nature exposing it to loathsomeness or moral disease, as the body is capable of mortification or leprosy. I do not care what you call it,—whose history you believe of it,—nor what you yourself can imagine about it; the origin, or nature, or name may be as you will, but the deadly reality of the thing is with us, and warring against us, and on our true war with it depends whatever life we can win. Deadly reality, I say. The puff-adder or horned asp is not more real. Unbelievable,—*those*,—unless you had seen them; no fable could have been coined out of any human brain so dreadful, within its own poor material sphere, as that blue-lipped serpent—working its way sidelong in the sand. As real, but with sting of eternal death—this worm that dies not, and fire that is not quenched, within our souls or around them. Eternal death, I say—sure, that, whatever creed you hold;—if the old Scriptural one, Death of perpetual banishment from before God's face; if the modern rationalist one, Death Eternal for *us*, instant and unredeemable ending of lives wasted in misery.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Time and Tide*, § 51 (*Works*, xvii. 361).

III.

The Vindication.

"The Lord said unto, Satan The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

The speaker here is the Angel of the Lord before whom Joshua stood, and when He says, "The Lord rebuke thee," there is the same distinction made between Him, the manifested Jehovah, and the invisible Jehovah that we find made in the account given of the destruction of the cities of the plain in Gen. xix. 24, where we read, "Then the Lord [*i.e.* the Angel of Jehovah who had visited Lot] rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." There is a distinction between the two, and yet the incommunicable name "Jehovah" belongs to both, and both are on an equality in respect of attribute, power, and honour. The language of the Lord here is not that of petition or desire; it is that of performance. As He "rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up" (Ps. cvi. 9), so here He rebuked the adversary, and he was silenced and rebuffed.

1. Satan is silenced, not by argument, but on this simple ground—the election of God. What though this is a sin-defiled and unworthy servant, shall that hinder the riches of God's free grace? Is he not chosen of the Father? and wherefore chosen but that he should be holy and without blame before Him in love? And shall His design be foiled, and the very object of His gracious purpose be set aside? What though he has followed too much the devices and desires of his own heart?—"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

To our Divine Lord, when on earth, the mystery of election was a theme for praise. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." How strange these words sound from the lips of Jesus! But with His knowledge we could rise to His praise. In heaven it is Christ's silencing answer to

the accusing enemy. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" That He chooses the sinner assures the righteousness of the choice. Even Satan is silenced. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

¶ Certain theologians have placed the eternal sovereignty in the Divine will, asserting that God "out of His mere good pleasure" entered into a covenant of grace with men. Others with a greater reach have passed beyond the fiat of God to His infinite wisdom—"the counsel of His will." But the heart cannot rest until it finds behind the wisdom of God the eternal love. "God's first decree," said an ancient Dutch divine, "is the bestowal of Christ." This is in agreement with the teaching of St. Paul: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love." The election of the saints is for life and service, for holiness and glory. God's chosen ones are the Divine ambassadors; they are witnesses to the preciousness of redeeming love. They are commissioned with the authority of the Master: "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."[1]

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.[2]

2. Then the Lord appeals to what He has done for Joshua already. Of Joshua, as representing the people, the Lord said, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" The same expression occurs in Amos iv. 11, where it is applied to the people of Israel rescued by God from amidst the terrible judgments which had been sent upon them, and by which they had been consumed as in a furnace. The expression is probably proverbial, and was used to convey the idea of unexpected deliverance from imminent calamity. Satan would have had the brand kept in "the furnace of affliction" until it was utterly consumed; but the Lord would not have it so; His grace and power had interposed to rescue His people from captivity, and He would complete the deliverance He

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *Life in His Name*, 81. [2] R. M. McCheyne.

had begun. The brand had been plucked from the burning, and was not again to be cast into the fire.

Israel in the Exile had been thrown into the fire of the Divine wrath. Much had been burnt, and perhaps all deserved to be. But at the critical moment the heart of God relented, and He snatched the burnt stump out of the fire. It was still defaced with what it had passed through, and bore the smell of burning. To gloat over the wretchedness of such a remnant was a shameful thing to do; and, for doing so, Satan received a sharp rebuke. But God Himself took up the brand tenderly, His repentings kindling together, to see what might still be made of it. Have I not already, He seems to say, snatched him from destruction; and shall I not deliver him from sin? I have delivered his soul from death; shall I not deliver his feet from falling, that he may walk before Me in the light of the living? I have done the greater, shall I not do the less? What can Satan answer? He is speechless.

¶ When the prairie catches fire, if the wind is blowing very strongly the prairie fire will travel faster than a horse can gallop. Those who have settled on the prairies see the devouring flames come, and they know they can't run away from them. What do they do? They burn a large space in the vicinity of their home; in a short time a very large piece of ground is absolutely cleared and blackened. What do they do then? For purposes of safety they go and stand on the ground where the fire has been already. When the great devouring prairie fire comes up it stops there—it can go no farther—there is nothing to burn. There is but one place where the fire has already been, and that is the cross of Calvary, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have only to come to the place where the fire has already been, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall hear these words: "I have caused thine iniquities to pass from thee."[1]

3. "And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take the filthy garments from off him." The speaker here is the Angel of the Lord, who gave the command to those that stood before Him, *i.e.*, the attendant angels who waited to do His pleasure, to remove from Joshua the filthy garments in which he had appeared. That this symbolized the remission of sins, and the acceptance into favour of Joshua and the people whom he

[1] *Church Pulpit Year Book*, 1909, p. 21.

represented, is seen from what follows. Addressing Joshua, the Lord says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee"—I have taken it away and delivered thee from it—"and I will clothe thee with change of raiment" (festive garments, or rich dress). The Targum explains this as meaning, "I have clothed thee with thy righteousness"; and such seems to be substantially the meaning.

One thing alone remained, and Joshua's restoration to favour was complete. "And I said"—why the prophet should have said it does not appear, but he seems to have been so overwhelmed with the interest of the vision as to have been carried out of himself—"And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments and the angel of the Lord stood by." The mitre was the sign and token of high priestly service, and Joshua knew, as it was placed upon his head, that he was once more "a priest in function," and that he was free to serve.

Seldom, if ever, do we find in Scripture the entire plan of God's salvation shadowed forth in any one individual; but here we have it all. The man is brought before our view as a sinner and as a saint, and in this little picture we have all the successive stages by which he passes from the one state to the other. We see the man brought step by step from a condition of defilement, shame, and ignominy—a position in which Satan himself, the accuser of the brethren, points at him and laughs him to scorn—and accepted before God and made splendid in beauty; and the work is not finished until—wonder of wonders—a mitre is put upon his head, and he is qualified for priestly work; and all the while this miracle of grace is being wrought the Angel of the Lord stands by.

¶ Sainthood is the concrete presentation of the spiritual element in humanity. It is the incarnation in human personalities of that Infinite Holy which is eternally seeking to make us share in its blessedness. But here arises a question. How far do the saints of the past stand for the true expression of the idea? Does sainthood, in the conception which is to rule the future, consist necessarily, as they imagined, in a withdrawal from the world's activities, in celibacy, in semi-starvation, in maiming and torturing the body, in a denial of the human joy of living? Are saints only of one type, the Church type? Are the men of affairs, the inventors, the captains of industry, the artists,

the musicians, to be by the nature of their calling excluded from the category? Are their products to be classed as non-sacred? Is sainthood of the cloister only, and never of the market-place?

That is a swiftly-dying, if not already an actually dead, idea. It is one which shuts God into one corner of His world. In its place has dawned a conception which is destined to remain. It is that which regards holiness as essentially a wholeness, which sees the saint as the complete man, and everything which tends to his completion as a holy ministration. Not in the torture of his body—as though God loved cruelty!—but in the development of its highest power; not in the restriction of his vision, but in such broadening as helps it to take in the whole of things; not in meaningless austerities, but in a joyous helping of one's fellows; not in the selection of one class of duties as specially consecrate, but in the pious dedication of our common work as a service of God: it is on these broader bases that the modern world will build its saintliness. . . . The saints are the men and women in whom the Divine Spirit works, and who in their day and generation listen to its voice and obey its call.[1]

¶ Thomas Olivers was one of the trophies of Whitefield's preaching. His conversion was almost a moral miracle. He was a Welshman, born at Tregaron in 1725. Being left an orphan at the age of five he early became bold in sin, and mastered the whole of the blasphemer's language, and was familiar with the dialect of hell, in fact, being considered the most wicked boy throughout the region where he lived. At eighteen he went as an apprentice to shoe-making, but never learned half his trade. He plunged into the grossest vices, and his sins were of the deepest dye. With another young man, wicked as himself, he "committed a most notorious and shameful act of arch villainy," which caused them suddenly to leave their neighbourhood. They went to Bristol, where Whitefield was then preaching. Young Olivers, while walking out one evening, saw a great number of people all pressing in one direction, and ascertained that they were going to hear Whitefield.

Says Olivers: "As I had often heard of Whitefield, and had sung songs about him, I said to myself, 'I will go and hear what he has to say.'" He arrived too late, but on the next evening he was some three hours ahead of time. He heard the great "son of thunder," who thundered conviction into his inmost soul, striking him with the hammer of God's word, and breaking a heart of stone. Whitefield's text was, "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?" Olivers says: "When the sermon began I was

[1] J. Brierley, *The Secret of Living*, 126.

a dreadful enemy of God and all that was good, and one of the most profligate and abandoned young men living; but during that sermon there was a mighty transformation in me. Showers of tears poured down my cheeks, and from that hour I broke off all my evil practices, and forsook all my wicked and foolish companions without delay, giving myself up to God and His service with all my heart. O what reason had I to say, 'Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?'"

The Gospel from the lips of Whitefield proved the power of God to the salvation of young Olivers. His after-life showed how wonderful was the change. He ever afterward remained a true soldier of the Lord. He joined Mr. Wesley's band and became one of his ablest itinerants, a flaming herald of the cross, an able minister of the New Testament. His hymn "The God of Abram praise" is one of inimitable beauty. James Montgomery, no mean poet himself, says concerning it, "There is not in our language a lyric of more majestic style, more elevated thought, or more glorious imagery." After a ministry of many years, this distinguished convert of Whitefield died suddenly March 7, 1799, and was buried in the tomb of Wesley, City Road Chapel, London.[1]

[1] J. B. Wakely.

The Supremacy of the Spiritual.

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The Supremacy of the Spiritual.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.—Zech. iv. 6.

1. The Lord, through the prophet Zechariah, addressed this message, under remarkable circumstances, to Zerubbabel, the prince and leader of the Jews, under whom the first company of the exiles, numbering about fifty thousand, returned from Babylon. On reaching Jerusalem, he with his fellow-exiles promptly set about building the second Temple. They laid the foundations with great rejoicing, in high hope of speedily completing the work. But seeing the smallness of their resources and the vastness of the undertaking, the large numbers who opposed and the fewness of those who helped, Zerubbabel and his people became discouraged, and ceased from their labours. For full fifteen years nothing was done. To arouse the leader and to stir up the people to resume and press forward the undertaking, the Lord by Zechariah addressed them, telling them that, though they were poor and weak in comparison with the builders of Solomon's Temple, yet God would have them know that the work was not wholly theirs, but was emphatically His, and must therefore be accomplished. For their encouragement He promised that His favour and the aid of His Spirit would be given them, furnishing in ways of His own all that was needed to complete the building. This He taught them by the symbolic vision of the golden candlestick and two olive trees, which is recorded in the context preceding the text, and of which the text is the explanation. The prophet saw a candlestick of gold, having seven lamps on the tops of seven branches, all connected with the central stem and to the bowl above by a golden pipe. On the right side of the candlestick was a living olive tree, and on the left side a similar olive tree. These trees poured from themselves a plentiful and unfailing supply of oil into the central bowl of the candlestick.

Then the prophet asked what the vision meant. The reply given was the words of the text—"This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

2. Zechariah had shared in the prevailing despondency of his time. He did not see what good could be accomplished by men of so little pith as Zerubbabel and the rest. He had taken their measure, and he despaired of them as the root or beginning of any noble undertaking or any fruitful work. Such men can never shine as lights in the world. Such feeble, incompetent persons could only bring disgrace on religion. In the vision of the candlestick it was made clear to Zechariah's mind that he had been wrong, not perhaps in his judgment of his contemporaries, but in forgetting one contemporary of whom he had made no account. "Not by might, nor by power"—so far he was right, there was neither might nor power—"but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." He was reminded of the source of the Church's light, and it was revealed to him that the oil which fed this light —the Spirit, that is, which produces right and God-glorifying results in men—flows from an inexhaustible source beyond the light itself; so that we can never measure the light by looking at the wick, or at the amount of oil each bowl can contain, but only by looking at the source whence the oil is supplied. With immense significance the oil was seen to be derived from two *living* olive trees—obviously to teach that, though the bowls might be very small, the supply out of which they could be refilled was inexhaustibly large, a living fountain of oil.

¶ Here the angel bears witness—that the power of God alone is sufficient to preserve the Church, and there is no need of other helps. For he sets the Spirit of God in opposition to all earthly aids; and thus he proves that God borrows no help for the preservation of His Church, because He abounds in all blessings to enrich it. Farther, by the word Spirit we know is meant His power, as though He had said, "God designs to ascribe to Himself alone the safety of His Church; and though the Church may need many things there is no reason why it should turn its eyes here and there, or seek this or that help from men; for all abundance of blessings may be supplied by God alone."

When therefore we now see things in a despairing condition,

let this vision come to our minds—that God is sufficiently able by His own power to help us, when there is no aid from any other; for His Spirit will be to us for lamps, for pourers, and for olive-trees, so that experience will at length show that we have been preserved in a wonderful manner by His hand alone.[1]

I.

1. The text teaches the central thought of religion—the supremacy of the spiritual over the material. There is no dispensing with the material, but the spiritual is supreme through the material. Here, in a single vision, is the relationship of life to organization, the relationship of the spiritual to the material; the material candlestick necessary to support the light, but the supply of the living flame coming, as it must come, from something which has life and continuance in itself, from the living olive trees.

The supremacy of the spiritual over the material — no truth is more difficult really to grasp as a practical belief than this. The world is so real, its forces are so powerful; not only the natural forces which we capture and tame and bend to our uses, the power of air and water and gravitation, the power of steam and electricity and explosives, but those other powers, the power of social position, the power of money, the power of combination, the power of custom, even the power of fact. We are so controlled by forces all around us that we are apt to forget that as Christians we walk by faith, not by sight. Religion consists in emancipation from the deadening slavery of things seen. It teaches us that behind this outward and visible framework there lives and moves a great spiritual Power with whom we may be united, that this universe which we see is but the clothing of God Himself, that the soul is a more wonderful thing than the body, that eating and drinking are not the chief concerns of the citizens of God's Kingdom, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, that the mightiest machine in the world is not to be compared with the humblest flower that grows, that Christianity is above riches, that love is stronger than death. In a word, religion teaches us the supremacy of the spiritual over the material.

[1] Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, v. 109.

2. There is a remarkable fascination about mere might and power. The tramp of armed men makes the city thrill with pride; the display of wealth and resources makes the nation glory in its enterprise and industrial capacity. Some men never tire of looking at that mighty proof of power, the locomotive, as it tears its way at express speed from one end of the land to the other, bearing its heavy freight as lightly as if it were a plaything of the nursery. How our eyes follow the mighty ocean liner as it draws itself quickly out of sight, and is soon lost to view over the horizon! How imposing as an illustration of power is a great fleet of war ships! Lines upon lines of mighty vessels; a huge collection of engines of destruction; a great display of human resource and ingenuity; a splendid proof of a nation's might and power upon the seas. All are attracted by these things. The dullest, the most self-centred, those with the smallest grasp of things secular and material, will be drawn out somewhat to the world of wonder and awe by the attractiveness of might and power.

Yet not a day passes but we see what a fitful and feeble thing at the best is human power. We cannot open a newspaper but we notice what veritable weaklings are man's mightiest works in the hands of the Creator. The wind rises in hurricane, and our strong creations are dashed in pieces like cockleshells. What of the ruined emblems of man's power to be found in ancient Greece and Rome—stupendous works like the Pyramids and Sphinx of Egypt, the temples of Assyria and India? Where is the might of these mighty empires to-day? Once they held sway over the known world. Once Egypt and Assyria made every neighbouring nation tremble at the mention of their name. Once upon a time the eagles of Rome flew from the farthest east to the farthest west. But where is their might to-day? Who would have prophesied the time when their power should be shattered, and all that was left of them should be the ruins of temple and palace, fit theme for poet to sing about and moralist to discourse upon?

3. It is "not by *might*." That is a word of very comprehensive meaning. Sometimes it denotes an army, and is significant of brute force, of coercion, of sheer repression. In all Christian work force is no remedy. And sometimes it denotes wealth, and

is significant of material substance, of buying power, bribing power, the carnal energies by which men are illicitly enticed and enslaved. Not by these means can the Kingdom be advanced. And sometimes it denotes valour, and is significant of the large energies of heart and will. And it is not by the unconfirmed courage of men that the work of the Lord is to be done. "Nor by *power*." This is surely suggestive of "capacity." It is a word which is elsewhere translated "lizard," probably as signifying stealth. It is also translated "chameleon," denoting adaptability, smartness, sharpness, the "quick-change" type of character. It was to this particular class that our Lord referred when He said: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent."

(1) The worship of *physical force* is anything but an obsolete idolatry. People of all classes in society crowd in admiration round the man with the strong arm. A war is the unfailing specific for all the world's diseases. Is anything wrong anywhere? War will set it right. It is well for us, however, to remember that the man who declared that Providence was on the side of the big battalions died defeated, a prisoner and an exile. Think of the equipment of the early Church in the Upper Room. How it would have excited the ridicule of military men of the world! This unarmed, undrilled company going to lead an attack upon the powers of darkness! But which would really be the more absurd—the sneer of the soldier, or the faith of the Apostles?

¶ In the course of a letter to a friend in Glasgow, a professor of the University of Copenhagen writes: "Indeed the war is terrible, but we understand that the mortal struggle cannot finish before the Germans have learned that physical force, as Professor T. A. Fleming says, is in the long run impotent unless backed by those spiritual forces which spring only from loyalty to the everlasting difference between right and wrong."[1]

¶ There are two opposite ways of trying to promote the triumph of good over evil. One way is that followed by the best men, from Buddha in India and Jesus in Palestine, down to the Non-Resisters of our own time. It is, to seek to see the truth of things clearly, to speak it out fearlessly, and to endeavour to act up to it, leaving it to influence others as the rain and sunshine act upon the plants. The influence of men who live in that way

[1] *Glasgow Herald*, Dec. 31, 1914.

spreads from land to land and from age to age. But there is another plan, much more often tried, which consists in making up one's mind what *other people* should do, and then using physical violence if necessary to make them do it. People who act like that—Ahab, Attila, Cæsar, Napoleon, and the Governments and militarists of to-day—influence people as long as they can reach them, and even longer; but the effect that lives after them and spreads furthest, is a bad one, inflaming men's hearts with anger, with patriotism, and with malice. These two lines of conduct are contrary the one to the other, for you cannot persuade a man while he thinks you wish to hit or coerce him.[1]

(2) Another modern symbol of power is *money*. The worship of wealth was never such a popular faith as it is to-day. And the power of money in Christian work is not to be despised. All honour to the rich men who have given the Saviour their wealth because they had first given Him their hearts; who have remembered their duties as stewards responsible to an Almighty Master; who have spent their money in relieving the wants of the least of the Lord's brethren, instead of wasting it on personal luxury, or hoarding it in useless avarice. Yet, after all, money is a broken reed in Christian work. Money may buy place and authority in religious organizations, but it cannot buy spiritual power.

¶ If a thing was according to the need of man and the will of God, it had to be done, and Paton laughed at the idea that considerations of money should stand in the way of its accomplishment. "We must never lose the battle for lack of powder and shot," he would say. But in itself money was nothing to him. It was kept in its proper place as means and not end. "Money I care not for," he writes to Mr. Henry Ollard, "save as all influence and all agencies it can bring are used unreservedly and sacredly for the winning of the world to God and holiness."[2]

¶ We live in a world where visible and tangible things exist, to which, on the immaterial side, there are spiritual correspondences. One of these things is money. The higher order of people are apt to say there are better things than money; that there is the wealth of aspiration, of noble purpose, of generous and liberal sympathies, of good health and right feeling. And this is deeply true; and if one were to choose from financial riches on the one side, and spiritual riches on the other, he who would choose

[1] A. Maude, *The Life of Tolstoy: Later Years*, 36.
[2] *John Brown Paton* (1914), 507.

the former rather than the latter would be a madman rather than a rational human being. All the same, however, there is no truth in a sort of vague, traditional feeling that material poverty is necessarily synonymous with spiritual wealth, or that material wealth is synonymous with spiritual poverty. That this not unfrequently is true does not in the least argue that it is necessarily so, or that it is an ideal state of affairs. Still, when wealth is gained by a man giving himself over, body and soul, to material accumulation; when it is gained by grinding down the wages of employés, by the oppression and selfishness of all competitive industry, why, then, to amass financial wealth is at the fearful price of spiritual development.[1]

(3) Another thing much worshipped in these days is *physical courage*. But a man may be physically brave yet morally a coward —as bold as a lion in one part of his nature and timid as a hare in others. A man may even lead a regiment into battle in face of the most fearful fire as stiff and unflinching as if he were made of steel; and yet when one talks to him one may find him timid in his opinions, always asking what others think and afraid to take any firm moral stand. To face danger boldly, to keep cool in trying circumstances may be the result of possessing a frame so truly strong that no nerve is exposed or sensitive. Physical courage, the mere meeting of pain or peril without quivering, by no means implies a similar endowment of moral courage.

¶ The Greek virtue of courage, confined almost entirely to valour in battle, has but little correspondence to anything that is supremely important in modern life. The kind of fortitude which is required for valour in battle is, even in its most inward aspect, somewhat different from that fortitude which sustains the modern man of science, politician, scholar, or philanthropist. Hence this side of ethical study is one which each generation of writers requires almost to reconsider for itself. However instructive the great work of Aristotle may still remain on this point (and there is perhaps nothing more instructive in the whole range of ethical literature), it is yet not quite directly applicable to the conditions of modern life.[2]

¶ We are not entitled to say that the Aristotelian ideal of fortitude has been either more or less *pure* than that which has been operative in Christendom; but there is no doubt that the

[1] Lilian Whiting, *The World Beautiful*, 172.
[2] J. S. Mackenzie, *A Manual of Ethics*, 353.

latter has become far more comprehensive, and it has become so in correspondence with an enhanced fulness in our conception of the ends of living. Faculties, dispositions, occupations, persons, of which a Greek citizen would have taken no account, or taken account only to despise, are now recognized as having their place in the realization of the powers of the human soul, in the due evolution of the spiritual from the animal man. It is in consequence of this recognition that the will to endure even unto death for a worthy end has come to find worthy ends where the Greek saw nothing but ugliness and meanness, and to express itself in obscure labours of love as well as in the splendid heroism at which a world might wonder.[1]

II.

1. Physical force, then, will not do the work that has to be done. Money will not do it. Courage will not do it. But if these are away, what is there left? If we tell men of the world that our desire cannot be accomplished by these things, they will reply, "Then you simply cannot do it at all." And they are right. We cannot. But God can, and God will. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Over against our weakness is set the almighty power of Jehovah. If we ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" we have the answer, "Our sufficiency is of God." We speak the truth when we say that without Christ we can do nothing; but not the whole truth until we add, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Even earthen vessels may hold a treasure. Even in weakness strength may be made perfect.

¶ It is by the operation of the Holy Spirit that the Church of Christ, and the Christian world in obedience to her authority, has condemned infanticide, slavery, cruelty, injustice, intemperance, impurity, and all the long catalogue of social evils in the world. The men and women who have fought these evils in Christ's name have one and all professed that it was not they who won the victory of themselves—not they, but a power within them, stronger than themselves, inspiring and energizing them, and rendering them capable of achievements beyond their natural scope. That Power, as they knew, had been no other than the Spirit of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,

[1] T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 280.

saith the Lord of hosts," is the motto inscribed upon their hearts.[1]

2. One of the greatest dangers of modern life is that we tend to put more faith in the power of machinery than in the power of the Spirit. If we are wise, there will be a growing resentment in our minds at the way in which life is broken up, and rendered shallow and unspiritual, by the mere multitude of good works, by want of depth and concentration. No doubt it is the natural temptation of an active and busy generation that so many workers for good causes are simply lost in the multiplicity of their own doings, immersed in practical and semi-secular affairs, absorbed in the mechanism of their work. We try, in fact, to do too many things; we have never really taken to heart the story of Martha and Mary; we forget that nothing will go well with us if the mechanism of our work is more thought of and cared for than the inspiration which alone makes it real and progressive. Men are so accustomed to look on the outward appearance and on material resources, even in Christian work. They are disposed to trust to the might of numbers, of organization, of training, and of experience. They rely also on the ability of their leaders, on their own prestige and past achievements. They make much of high official position, of social rank, of wealth and worldly relationship. These God also takes into His account and uses them; but He is not confined to them. He has other and mightier powers which He employs to build up His house. In all Christian work there is a tendency for the mind to become concentrated upon the lamp-stand of solid gold, and to forget the olive trees; to be engrossed in the costly mechanism and to be forgetful of the life. It is well, therefore, for us to be reminded that our most elaborate equipment will be futile without the mystic grace of God.

¶ Amiel's *Journal Intime* is the history of a man told by himself,—a fine mind and beautiful nature, but on the whole a pathetic story—the conflict, so common in our time, between the intellect and the heart, including in that last word the *spirit*, which is the Divine side of the heart. He was in heart a believer, in intellect not an agnostic, but perplexed. I suppose the right view is that neither is to be taken by itself. The heart without

[1] J. E. C. Welldon, *Revelation of the Holy Spirit.*

the intellect will lead to superstition, the intellect without the heart to Pantheism, or Materialism or blank Nihilism. The intellect must take the emotional and spiritual part of man into account in forming its theories, as the physicist does with the facts of nature. How to give the intellect and spirit their proper place is the cause of the conflict, and perhaps this conflict is a necessary condition of our progress and of our final establishment in the best way. Without sin the solution would have been easier. The conflict might have been only a keen, friendly discussion. And so the way to get above doubt is to rise into the region of the spirit, carrying our reason with us: "He that doeth his will shall know," etc. "Blessed are the pure in heart."[1]

3. Nothing aroused the anger of Christ more than this intrusion of the mechanical into the spiritual, the encroachment of machinery upon life. As He studied with prophetic eye the religion of His day, as exhibited in its most orthodox representatives, He saw how fatal that intrusion was. Religion had passed from a life into a mechanism. We know how constantly, and how easily, in the history of religion, the spiritual hardens into the mechanical. The prayer-wheel of the Buddhist, the ceaseless repetitions of the Koran, are but symptoms of a disease that has not left Christianity itself unassailed. They have their counterparts in Christendom to-day. Even the regular attendance at public prayer, even the constant participation in the highest act of Christian worship, carry with them the perils of familiarity. The danger of mechanical religion is that we may lose sight of the end in the means, may even forget that there is an end for each and all of us, here and hereafter—personal righteousness, the realization of the image of God in man, the saving of the soul. Behind the things of sense lie the things of the spirit; behind Nature, God; behind time and the world, death and judgment and eternal life. Let us hold fast to the first principles of our faith, to the things which are not seen but are eternal.

¶ Keble was ordained Deacon on Trinity Sunday, 1815, and Priest on Trinity Sunday, 1816, both by the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. William Jackson; and in July of the latter year, writing to me, he said, "I want your prayers, too; very much I want them, for every day I feel the dangers and anxieties of my profession increase upon me. Pray for me that I may not pollute God's

[1] *Letters of the Rev. John Ker*, 355.

altar with irregular, worldly-minded, self-complacent thoughts. Pray for me that I may free myself from all pride, all ambition, all uncharitableness. You cannot think how a little word which you dropped one day, the last we met together at Oxford, struck me, and how it has abode with me ever since. You cautioned me against Formalism; I thought it hard at the time, but now I know you had too good reason. Help me by your prayers, your advice, if any occurs to you; and your reproof, if you at any time think I need it, to get rid of that dangerous habit."[1]

III.

1. Human might has limits set to it, if it were only because it cannot achieve the highest and best results. It can civilize, but it cannot redeem. It can bring changes, some of them excellent changes, in the shape of social, physical, and even intellectual benefits; but it cannot Christianize. It can reform, but it cannot convert. It can alter circumstances, but it cannot change character. It can do much on the surface; but it cannot go deep down to the roots of the nature, and produce radical changes, the highest and eternal results. Now, it is just here that the magnificent claim of the text comes in. At the point where social reform and human culture lie baffled and broken, the Christian faith comes in with its supreme influence, because it is backed by the Divine power of the Spirit. It aims at the best results. It is omnipotent in the sphere of moral and spiritual things. It changes the heart and renews the mind. It redeems the soul and cleanses the character. It goes down to the springs of human nature; hence it revolutionizes the life; and thus it redeems society, because it first redeems the individual. Its sphere is found where human might and resource know no way of admittance. It deals with the soul, with the heart, with the eternal part of human nature. It speaks to men of sin and righteousness, of death and eternity and judgment, of salvation and heaven and life everlasting. It introduces new motives, and instils new desires. It implants new aims, holds up new and glorious ideals, gives grace and strength to work up to them. Where human might cannot enter, the Spirit of God has supreme

[1] J. T. Coleridge, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Keble*, i. 59.

dominion. Where human power falls back hopeless and helpless, the Spirit of God achieves its grandest results. Human empires come and go; they rise and fall, and others take their place; but the Empire of the Divine Spirit retains its early power to regenerate human hearts and renew and glorify human lives.

¶ When I was turned from one whose business was to shirk into one whose business was to strive and persevere, it seemed to me as though all had been done by some one else. I was never conscious of a struggle, never registered a vow, nor seemingly had anything personally to do with the matter. I came about like a well-handled ship. There stood at the wheel that unknown Steersman whom we call God.[1]

¶ Not by power are we to conquer, but by the sacred energies of the Holy God. "By my Spirit"; shall we reverently give it the old translation and say, "By my wind"? It is the breath of the Lord, creating atmosphere sometimes like a cool, refreshing air, sometimes like a withering simoom; sometimes like a tempestuous whirlwind. "He breathed upon them and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." But here is the other ministry of the same breathing: "The grass withereth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." It is an atmosphere in which the good is quickened, and in which all that is evil is inevitably destroyed. It is, therefore, with this mystic wind, this spiritual minister, that we are to go about our work. We are to do it in the intimate fellowship of the Lord.[2]

2. Now, may we not say that, in regard to the work of the Christian Church, this power is indispensable and essential? that where there is not the power of the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts all else is vain? We can never count upon success when the Spirit of God is absent. Every dry and barren period of the Church's history tells the same tale. There may be intellectual gifts and literary culture. There may be riches and worldly resource. There may be social status and human influence. But over against these, with all the goodness that may be in them, we hear the cry echoing through the vaulted corridors of the Church's life, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." These, at their best, are of the earth, earthy. They are but parts of human might and earthly resource, which have their limits appointed to them. But this supreme

[1] R. L. Stevenson. [2] J. H. Jowett.

force of the Spirit of God is Divine; it is Almighty. It partakes of the nature of Him who is everlasting and omnipotent. Those others are the hands that lay the train; or, rather, they are the materials laid upon the pile. This is the magic flash of fire that kindles them into a mighty flame. This is the electric touch that can call forth all the force that lies in these, and make them truly mighty for the overthrow of strongholds of sin and Satan. Learning and scholarship, literary power, tact, address, resource; who shall despise them? They are all needed in the work of the Kingdom. But the first essential that can make men truly powerful is the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts.

Therefore, to rest on any other source of power is to lean on a bruised reed that will break and pierce the hand that leans upon it. What constitutes the power of a church? Numbers? God would rather have seven consecrated men and women than seven thousand who are living according to the course of this world. Where lies the strength of a church? In human wealth and patronage? Sometimes these are curses instead of blessings. The power of any church is the Holy Spirit. If He be in the preacher and in the believer, and in the general body of disciples, there is no telling what wonderful things may be done.

¶ The baptism of the fulness of spiritual energy, of moral force, is a mysterious and an extraordinary event in the history of the race. "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God." The Old Testament knew the manifestation of this power in varying measures, yet it never witnessed the revelation of that power in its fulness. The Romans with pick and spade could do little in making roads through rocks and mountains. The use of gunpowder in the seventeenth century raised blasting to a science. The introduction of dynamite, thrice as powerful as gunpowder, entirely revolutionized that science. And then, again, nitro-glycerine, half as strong again as dynamite, has largely superseded dynamite. In the moral world, in various directions and ages, men have proved in various degrees the spiritual power by which they subdue sin and achieve holiness, but to us is the Spirit given without measure. Do I realize the saving, sanctifying Power?[1]

3. Did not the Lord who breathed on His Apostles, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," also charge them to tarry at

[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Gates of Dawn*, 132.

Jerusalem till they were endued with power from on high. For nothing less than the power from on high could fit them for their arduous work, and nothing less than the Spirit of God could effect the great change to be wrought in the hearts and lives of the people. So it came to pass that, when God's time came, even the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God gave the Apostles new powers and gifts, and the people new ears to hear and hearts to feel and understand. In a word, the Spirit of God breathed the breath of spiritual life into the new gospel creation. His life was the source of the Church's spiritual power then and has been ever since. We must get back, therefore, to the primal sources of spiritual power; to prayer and meditation, to the study of the Bible, to sacramental grace and the realization of the Divine Presence. There are many among us who seem to have no capacity for suffering; and if we cannot suffer, how can we save? If we are never haunted by the sinfulness of the world, if we never know what it is to be crushed, humbled by the littleness of our own work and the greatness of men's need—if we are satisfied with the tiny circle of our own self-complacent career, and never look out into the wide wilderness about us where men toil and faint and suffer and despair—let us go back to the Bible and learn to see in that cross which throws its splendour and its shadow on every page the bitterness of human sorrow and the awfulness of human sin. The story of the cross, the story that changed the world, is the means by which the Divine Spirit works His great miracles. The cross of shame, the cross of bitter agony, the cross of terrible defeat, but also the cross of atoning love, love gloriously triumphant,—by this sign the Spirit conquers, proving Himself stronger than warlike might and earthly substance. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit" revealing to sinful men a crucified and risen Redeemer, the sinner's refuge, the sinner's hope, the sinner's plea.

¶ The Spirit of the Lord of Hosts is love—the sacrifice of might and power. The world has been made great by the gentlest of all its forces. Man had no dominion over the beast of the field until the advent of love. The animal raged within him unsubdued until the Christ came. Thunder, earthquake, and fire strove in vain to quell it; it yielded only to the still small voice. The Jew proposed the terrors of the law; the philosopher advised the crucifixion of feeling. Neither could suppress the passions of

the soul. But when love came, it conquered the old passions by a new passion. It sent not thunder but lightning. It forbade nothing; it crucified nothing; it destroyed nothing; it simply flashed on me the light of a new Presence and the old presence died. There was no mutilation of the heart; there was no destruction of the heart's ancient possessions; there was just a transcendent glory which made the ancient possessions valueless; they were destroyed "by the brightness of his coming."[1]

4. We often speak and act as though we expected the presence of the Spirit to be shown in the same miraculous manner as on the Day of Pentecost, but have we any right to expect this? We forget that we are living after Pentecost, not before it; that the Holy Spirit has come to this earth and has not departed. Our Lord's words were, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever." If we read the Epistles carefully, we shall not find a single passage commanding Christians to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost; only one passage that can possibly be interpreted as a prayer of the writer that the Church might receive the blessing of the Holy Ghost; but scores of passages implying that the Holy Ghost is already in the Church, and that what Christians have to do is not so much to pray that He may come as to take heed lest by their own unfaithfulness they lose the blessing which is already theirs. The warning, "Quench not the Spirit," is addressed not to unbelievers but to believers; and the way in which we quench the Spirit is by refusing to open our hearts to the influences that are always waiting for entrance. Are we wrong, then, when we pray to be filled with the Spirit, when we pray that that Spirit may take more complete possession of our hearts? By no means. There is none of the good gifts of God that we do wrong to pray for. But we do wrong if we pray for the Spirit, and then, when His voice speaks, close our ears. We do wrong if we pray for the Spirit, and then bolt the door of the heart. How often we clamour for more light, when all that we need is to open our eyes!

¶ The keynote of the twenty-first annual convention of Christian Endeavour at Middlesborough was struck by the Rev. James Spedding of Birkenhead, who reminded the delegates that

[1] G. Matheson, *Voices of the Spirit*, 89.

all the elaborate plans and programmes for the convention would be as machinery with no driving force apart from the Divine Spirit. He little thought how perfect an illustration of his message the convention would provide. The great Town Hall of Middlesborough, seating some 4000 people, was thronged for a praise service—"The Evangel of Jesus," composed by a local organist of conspicuous ability; a choir of 350 voices was in readiness; Felix Corbett, a master musician of the north, was at the keyboard of one of England's noblest organs. The brilliant composer, R. G. Thompson, Mus.Bac., was on his dais. But the organ remained silent. We could soon tell there was some misadventure, the fact being that one of the wires of one of the electric motors was out of order. Till an electrician had been sent for, and had repaired the fused and broken wire, the choir had to sing to the weaker accompaniment of the piano. Great was the relief of conductor, choir, and audience when once more the electric power was free to rush into the organ. Only as the link between ourselves and God is established and maintained can great things happen in our individual lives and our Christian societies.[1]

¶ Some time ago I stood on the east coast of England and looked out over a stretch of oozy slime and ill-smelling mud. There were the barges high and dry, lying on their sides, in the mud. No good their heaving the anchor or hoisting the sail—all this availed them nothing. And as I looked out upon it I thought within myself—What is the remedy? Were it any use for the Corporation to pass a bye-law that every citizen should bring pot, kettle, or pan filled with water, and pour it out upon the stretch of mud? But as I watched I saw the remedy—God turned the tide. In swept the waters of the sea and buried the mud, and then came the breath of sweetness and life. And it flowed in about the barges, and instantly all was activity. Then heave-ho with the anchor, then hoist the sails, then forth upon some errand of good. So is it that we stand looking out upon many a dreadful evil that fills us with dismay—drunkenness, gambling, impurity. Is there any remedy? And the churches, so very respectable, dreadfully respectable many of them—but alas! high and dry on the mud—for these, too, what is the remedy? We want the flood-tide—the gracious outpouring of the Spirit; then must come the roused and quickened churches. It is ours now if we will have it: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me."[2]

[1] S. Pearce Carey.

[2] M. G. Pearse, *Parables and Pictures*, 108.

Mysterious Presence, Source of all,—
The world without, the soul within,
Fountain of Life, O hear our call,
And pour Thy living spirit in!

Thou breathest in the rushing wind,
Thy beauty shines in leaf and flower;
Nor wilt Thou from the willing mind
Withhold Thy light and love and power.

Thy hand unseen to accents clear
Awoke the psalmist's trembling lyre,
And touched the lips of holy seer
With flame from Thine own altar-fire.

That touch divine still, Lord, impart,
Still give the prophet's burning word;
And vocal in each waiting heart
Let living psalms of praise be heard.[1]

[1] S. C. Beach.

Contrition.

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CONTRITION.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced: and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.—Zech. xii. 10.

THIS is one of the prophecies given to Israel during its later period, when the vigorous spiritual life of the nation had already departed. But Moses expressed the same thought in his prophetic prayer: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. xi. 29). These prophecies are evidence of the Old Testament prophetic conviction that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit in those days was exceedingly limited; that the real dispensation of the Holy Spirit was still tarrying; and that only in the days of the Messiah was it to come in all its fulness and glory.

1. In this remarkable prophecy, dealing with national repentance, the state of things usually depicted in the Old Testament Scriptures is inverted; for while we are generally shown a people undergoing misery and suffering, and then raised, as the result, to heights of prosperity, we see here a people delivered from their straits and hardships and brought forth into a large place, and thereby awakened to a sense of fault, and laid low in the dust of contrition.

The Jewish Remnant returned from the Babylonian Captivity, and, occupied with efforts to re-establish themselves in their land and to rebuild their ruined Temple, were enduring many difficulties and severities, especially from the opposition of neighbouring tribes, whose hostility was for ever harassing and thwarting them; and into the breast of the anxious prophet, whose mission it was to cheer and animate, there steals, amid his broodings, a vision of all these pestering tribes, uniting at length in a

tremendous assault upon the poor struggling Remnant—to be utterly routed and destroyed. He sees Jerusalem made a cup of trembling to its foes; the Lord smiting every horse with astonishment and his rider with madness; the governors of Judah—like a hearth of fire among the wood, and like a flaming torch in a sheaf—devouring the assailants on the right hand and on the left; the feeblest of Israel as irresistible as David, and the house of David as God. It was one of those visions, in dark times, of triumph and glory beyond that are never fulfilled; and, in dreaming thus of marvellous blessing for his country, Zechariah was only following in the wake of the prophets who had preceded him. His distinction is that he dreams of this splendid victory to come as bringing with it a great national mourning and lamentation for sin. He sees the whole land, not surrendered to rejoicing, not jubilant with feast and song, but clothed from end to end in sackcloth of repentance—a solemn silence in the streets; every family withdrawn to weep apart. That was his idea of what should be—a people stirred by extraordinary mercies to a deep impression of their unworthiness.

2. Sorrow or disaster, whether by inducing a humbler temper and self-estimate, or by giving an impression of wrath and punishment, or by desolating the external scene and driving the heart in upon itself, is often the means of rousing men to a recognition and conviction of their sins. It was so continually with the ancient Hebrews; reverse and suffering awoke them time after time to the error of their ways, and set them repenting—with tears, perhaps, that were sincere enough, and not without some temporary purifying effect. Is it not, however, a finer thing, and the sign of a finer nature, when good fortune provokes earnest thoughts with regard to duty and our imperfect discharge of it; when discontent with ourselves and our moral attainment, regret for past deficiencies and failings, with anxiety to be worthier than we are, are excited by signal benedictions, by some great deliverance or success; when, the more life smiles for us and brings us of pleasantness and beautiful possession, the more we yearn to be deserving? Such was the nobler disposition which Zechariah dreamt of being manifested in his countrymen. He imagined them no longer swept to repentance merely before

the cutting blast of affliction, but softly constrained to it by the magnitude of their mercies; when most exalted and enriched in condition, *then*, most deeply penetrated with the sense of their shortcomings, and most burdened with aspiration to amend and excel. He saw the whole nation in the hour of their grand triumph moved to confess and renounce their sins at the feet of God; not, as we have often been called to do, in a season of sharp distress or imminent peril, when harvests have failed or pestilence has stalked through the land, but when trouble has given place to the brightness of unexampled prosperity. To be moved thus was something higher than Israel had yet attained to; and this, after all, is true gratitude to heaven beneath a shower of blessings; to have the sweet shower touching us with unrest and pain that we were not worthier, and kindling new solicitude for self-improvement. To give true thanks for what we receive is to throb with passion, to be comelier and more perfect men.

3. It is God Himself who begins the work of grace in the heart of man. "I will pour out—the spirit of grace and supplication." It is not in fallen man to renew his own heart. Can the adamant turn itself to wax, or the granite soften itself to clay? Only He who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundation of the earth can form and reform the spirit of man within him. The power to make the rock of our nature flow with rivers of repentance is not in the rock itself. As long as the heart is untouched by the spirit of grace, it either remains in a state of utter insensibility in reference to God and sin on the one hand, or, on the other hand, it is troubled with feelings of reproach and fear, but without being persuaded and changed. In ordinary circumstances the sinner is disposed to think as seldom as possible of God and the relation in which he stands to Him. There may be times, however, when he is shaken out of his habitual self-complacency. Possibly disease has seized upon him, and death seems in hard pursuit, and hell appears not far behind. Or the conscience is awakened, he cannot tell how, from its habitual lethargy; it speaks to him as one having authority, and summons him as it were to the bar of God's judgment, to give an account of his actions. Now, the great body of mankind flit between these two extremes, being generally in a state of insensibility, but at

times troubled with regrets as to the past and fears as to the future. But as the heart when in the one state, that of unconcern, is in a sinful condition, so in the other state, of mere compunction and fear, it is far from being in a healthy condition. We need the power from on high on the one hand to arouse us from our habitual carelessness, and on the other hand to conduct to genuine faith and true peace. We may seek for repentance, and like Esau seek it carefully with tears; but we can "find no place for repentance" till He who knows our hearts and has access to them unlocks them and opens up fountains within us. Mere natural reproaches of conscience and alarms of coming judgments may stun the heart for a time, but they cannot break or melt it.

4. When the heart grows sensitive to the touch of God's Spirit, the result is seen in prayer and supplications. Prayer is just the breathing of the Spirit in us; power in prayer comes from the power of the Spirit in us, waited on and trusted in. Failure in prayer comes from feebleness of the Spirit's work in us. Our prayer is the index of the measure of the Spirit's work in us. To pray aright, the life of the Spirit must be right in us. For praying the effectual, much-availing prayer of the righteous man everything depends on being full of the Spirit. God in heaven gives His Spirit in our hearts to be there the Divine power praying in us, and drawing us upward to our God. God is a Spirit, and nothing but a like life and Spirit within us can hold communion with Him. It was for this that man was created, that God might dwell and work in him, and be the Life of his life. It was this Divine indwelling that sin lost. It was this that Christ came to exhibit in His life, to win back for us in His death, and then to impart to us by coming again from heaven in the Spirit to live in His disciples. It is this, the indwelling of God through the Spirit, that alone can explain and enable us to appropriate the wonderful promises given to prayer. God gives the Spirit as a spirit of supplication, too, to maintain His Divine life within us as a life out of which prayer ever rises upward.

¶ McCheyne used to say that a great part of his time was occupied in getting his heart in tune for prayer. It does take time sometimes, and the heart never would get in tune if it were not for the Holy Spirit of God. It is He who prepares the

heart for prayer; He who creates within us the desire to pray. This does not mean that we ought never to pray save as we are certain of the impulse of the Holy Spirit. We "ought always to pray," and even though the heart be out of tune, though it be dull and cold and heavy, even though we do not feel like praying, we ought to bow humbly and reverently before God, and tell Him how cold and prayerless our hearts are, and as we thus wait in silence before Him our hearts will be warmed and stirred and strangely impressed with the mind of God, and coming thus into tune with the heart of God it shall be made indeed a heart of prayer.[1]

¶ We always receive three gifts from God when we pray humbly and earnestly. The first, St. Nilus says, is the gift of prayer itself. "God wishes to bless thee for a longer time while thou art persevering in thy prayer; for what more blessed than to be detained in colloquy with God?" We pretend for a while not to hear the petitions of those we love, because we so love to hear them asking. So Joseph feigned with his brethren. "You say," observes St. John Climacus, "'I have received nothing from God,' when all the while you have received one of His greatest gifts, perseverance in prayer." "He delays to hear His saints," says St. Gregory, "that He may increase their merits. By this perseverance we prepare ourselves to receive the Grace with much greater fruit than if it were given us at once." St. Isidore says, "God delays to hear your prayer either because you are not in good dispositions to receive what you ask, or that you may be able to receive more excellent gifts which He is desirous of conferring upon you." So, says Gerson, "it happens to us as it does sometimes to a beggar, to whom men give a more liberal alms because they have kept him waiting at their door so long."[2]

5. Supplication melts into contrition as we direct our eyes to the cross, which our sins erected. "They shall look unto me whom they have pierced: and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." Calvin and other commentators interpret the "piercing" of the text metaphorically for the continual provocation of their God. In the Septuagint the reading is, "They shall gaze upon me because they insulted." But St. John, who, if he did not translate for himself from the Hebrew, used another version than the Septuagint, has, "They shall look on him whom they pierced." The Fourth Evangelist, at any rate, has

[1] W. E. Biederwolf.

[2] *The Spirit of Father Faber* (1914), 39.

no hesitation in applying the prophecy to the piercing of the Saviour on Calvary's cross.

¶ Many years ago there was a striking picture to be seen in one of the galleries of Paris. It was the picture of the dead Christ. On the left side was a child holding in its two tiny hands the pale, worn, strained Hand of the Saviour. The child had been gazing on the dark, blood-stained wound in the centre of the Palm, and the eyes were brimful of tears, the brows were knit, the face was grieved with anguish, and the lips quivered![1]

¶ You all remember the action of Michael Angelo's Christ,—the right hand raised as if in violence of reprobation; and the left closed across His breast, as refusing all mercy. The action is one which appeals to persons of very ordinary sensations, and is very naturally adopted by the Renaissance painter, both for its popular effect, and its capabilities for the exhibition of his surgical science. But the old painter-theologian [Orcagna], though indeed he showed the right hand of Christ lifted, and the left hand laid across His breast, had another meaning in the actions. The fingers of the left hand are folded, in both the figures; but in Michael Angelo's as if putting aside an appeal; in Orcagna's, the fingers are bent to draw back the drapery from the right side. The right hand is raised by Michael Angelo as in anger; by Orcagna, only to show the wounded palm. And as, to the believing disciples, He showed them His hands and His side, so that they were glad,—so, to the unbelievers, at their judgment, He shows the wounds in hand and side. They shall look on Him whom they pierced.[2]

(1) *The cross reveals our sin.*—The vileness of an object is revealed by contrast with some other of perfect purity. The shadows of the mountains are best realized when we can contrast them with their lights; dark caves are appreciated properly only in the day, as they defy the sunbeams of heaven. So is it with these vile souls of ours; they never seem so vile as when they are brought alongside the pure heart of Christ, and are seen in their natural relations to Him.

(2) *The cross condemns our sin.*—It is apparently easy to shuffle off responsibility by affirming that we were not partakers in the blood of the prophets, that we were not parties to the crucifixion of Christ; we may even subscribe, as the Jews did, to build monuments for the martyrs, and condemn their murderers, yet

[1] F. Harper, *Echoes from the Old Evangel*, 44.
[2] Ruskin, *Val d'Arno*, x. § 256 (*Works*, xxiii. 149).

our spirits may be all the while such as to make us responsible for the past. We cannot cut ourselves adrift from our antecedents or our ancestry, as sailors slip a cable in the night. Christ indeed affirmed a principle in His day about descending and accumulating responsibility which we must recognize. He told His contemporaries that their treatment of Himself demonstrated that they were the persecuting children of those persecuting sires who had shed the blood of the prophets, and that all that blood would be required of them since they were about to murder *Him*. Their repudiation of the murder of the prophets, their subscriptions to build their tombs, their effort to sever themselves from the responsibilities of the past, would not avail them so long as they cherished vindictive feelings towards the incarnate God.

(3) *The cross is the instrument of true repentance.*—We cannot intelligently contemplate the crucifixion without feeling that our spiritual attitude is naturally such towards Christ as to involve us in the crime of His death. Sin we see clearly is *Deicide*, and deserves death and exile from God for ever. We come, in fact, through the cross into a state of apprehension lest the just judgment of God overtake us on account of sin.

But once the love of the cross is felt as a regenerating power, we come to feel very differently regarding our sins. That is to say, we do not so much fear the punishment they deserve, we do not sorrow over them as those that have no hope, but we come to sorrow over them as wrongs done to our nearest and dearest friend, and we turn from them and from ourselves with deepest loathing. In a word, we come to "sympathize with the law that condemns us; we take God's side against ourselves, and hate the sin more than we fear the punishment."

(4) *This repentance is of a most thoroughgoing kind.*—The grief for sin itself is overborne and compassed about by the greater grief occasioned by the sad results of sin upon the person of the pierced One. Sin is grieved over as it is against the Lord: even as David cries, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." The mourning of a penitent is not because of hell; if there were no hell he would mourn just as much. His grief is not for what sin might cost himself, but for what it has cost the Substitute. He bemoans himself thus: "Oh, how could I have pierced Him? How could I have wounded the Beloved? Lover of my soul, how could

I have pierced Thee?" True penitents smite upon their breasts as they behold their Saviour bleeding on the tree. This is genuine contrition.

They "shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." The Israelite was specially sensitive concerning the death of his offspring. To lose his firstborn was as when a nation loses its prince. To lose his only son was to quench the light of the house. The old man mourns, "I am as good as dead. I am blotted out of the book of the living, for I have now no son to bear my name. The lamp has gone out in my tent, for my son, my only son, my firstborn, has gone down to the gates of the grave!" The case was hopeless for the future; none remained to continue his family among those who sit in the gate, and the old man rent his clothes and wept sore.

The prophet could not recollect any mourning which he had ever heard of that was like it, except the lamentation of the people for the death of Josiah. Then all Judah mourned, and Jeremiah wrote sad dirges, and other prophets and poets poured forth their lamentations. Everywhere throughout the land there went up an exceeding great and bitter cry, for the good king had fallen, and there were no princes of like mind to follow him. Alas, poor nation, it was thy last bright hour which saw him ride to the battle; in his death thy star has set! In the valley of Hadadrimmon the lamentation began, but it spread through all the land. The fatal fight of Megiddo was mourned by every woman in Jerusalem. Bravely had Josiah kept his word, and sought to repel the Egyptian invader; but the hour of Judah's punishment was come and Josiah died. A mourning as sincere and deep comes to us when we perceive that Jesus died for us. Blessed be His name; the joy that comes of it when we see sin put away by His death turns all the sorrow into joy.

¶ The text is one of those prophetic passages which, viewed from whatever standpoint, are luminous with rays of prophetic anticipation. Jehovah speaks. The time cometh when the rebellious people shall mourn, beholding the pierced One. That piercing became a possible and literal event when the Incarnate Son of Jehovah yielded His body to the nails and to the spear. The evangelist St. John quotes the ancient prediction, "They shall look on him whom they pierced," as having become a fact through the cross on Calvary. His application of the words to Christ

expresses a prophecy of continued fulfilment in the New Testament age. The words of Zechariah are a Messianic prophecy, and applicable only and wholly to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We see the fulfilment of them commencing in the circumstances of His crucifixion, but continued in a nobler sense after Pentecost, when many of those who had clamoured for His blood, looked back with horror on their deed, and, repenting, were converted. We find the prophecy fulfilled in the mental gaze on Him whom their sins have pierced, which is repeated in the daily conversion of souls, both of Gentile and of Jew. That look is the essence of Christian worship, in the approach to God through Christ the crucified, in the continual memorial of Christ's death at the altar, in the observance of holy Passiontide.[1]

6. Contrition issues in cleansing. The prophet goes on to promise in the name of God, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." We are delivered from guilt, we are saved from sin, through the grace and Spirit of God. A radical change is wrought within us; grace "bringeth salvation"; "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The blood shed, instead of crying out for vengeance, is found to cry out for pardon to be extended to the guilty; the place of our deep conviction becomes the scene of our deliverance. The valley of Achor is constituted a door of hope; inability yields to the triumphant grace of God; salvation reaches us through the cross.

The propitiation of His blood lies on our part in its humbling, convicting, melting power upon human souls, in the power which it has to make us ashamed, and discontented with our poor quality, with our low level, and to agitate us with strong sighs after nobler being and living. In proportion as He sets us weeping with pungent regret and wistful aspiration, there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.

¶ It was from this passage that Cowper got his idea of the guilt-cleansing fountain of Christ's blood; yet, instead of a fountain

[1] G. H. Gwilliam, in *The Expository Times*, xi. 395.

filled with the blood of an atoning victim, what the Jewish writer had evidently in his mind was a fountain filled with the tears of the people's genuine and deep contrition. Such was the fountain in which he conceived of them as losing "all their guilty stains." Like another Jewish writer, he had learnt to feel, "Thou desirest not sacrifice; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." He saw heaven's pardon granted at once to repentance. "What a fountain for washing," he thought, "in those silent and sincere tears of which I dream!"[1]

¶ In a work jointly written by [the Quaker saint] William Bayley [who died in 1675] and John Crook, the following remarks occur:—"We do in the sight of God really own the blood of the Son of Man, . . . both as bespeaking the remission of sin past, through faith in it, and as sprinkling the conscience of true believers, and cleansing them from all sin. . . . By all which it is manifest to be of infinite value. . . . But because we testify that it is not the bare, historical, and literal belief of those things that justifies or makes us really free from that wrath which comes upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but only the life and virtue of this blood, received into the heart by that living faith which Christ alone is author of: therefore we are branded with slighting the blood of the Christ though we testify that without the life and virtue of this blood there is no remission."[2]

[1] S. A. Tipple. [2] F. A. Budge, *Annals of the Early Friends*, 211.

The Fellowship of the Saints.

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The Fellowship of the Saints.

They that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.—Mal. iii. 16.

The Bible is rich in special encouragements for the dark and difficult day. Scattered all over its biographical pages are the portraits of the good men of unfavourable periods, made strong by grace to meet their trying surroundings, and not only to meet them and endure them, but to illuminate and bless them. The Psalms, in far the larger number of them, are, from the human side, just the "good thoughts in bad times" of sorely tried and tempted children of God. And the writings of the Prophets and of the Apostles may often be described, from the same human side, in the same terms. Here, in the last page of the Old Testament, we have not the prophet's own utterance of this sort, but a very beautiful allusion to many such utterances around him; an allusion full of cheer, and full of teaching, for ourselves.

If ever there was a time when the outlook was dreary and sin abounded, when men had been almost justified in a policy of despair, it was the time when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to be governor for his second term, with the express object of making another effort to reform abuses, and when Malachi the prophet stood by his side. God's love in the past, on which the prophet bases his remonstrance, had seemed to be all in vain. Not the wonders of Egypt, or of the Red Sea, or of the wilderness, or the preservation in Canaan, had been able to preserve the chosen people from a degrading fall. If the captivity in Babylon had sufficed to eradicate idolatry, it seemed to have had but little effect on the people's worship of the true God or on their moral life. The prophet vigorously rebukes the priests, the natural guides of the people, as mainly responsible for the nation's sins. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I

be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name." So little did they realize their responsibility or their guilt that they even asked, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" They had offered to God offerings which they would not dare offer to a civil governor. They had murmured at the smallness of their gains. They had brought blemished and diseased animals to the sacrifice. Disgrace and punishment were impending for their reiterated sins. And as with the priests so with the people. They had robbed God by withholding from Him tithes and offerings which were due. They had gone on in rebellion against His government. The cup of their impiety was full. And side by side with this desecration of holy things there were grievous moral disorders. They had taken in marriage worshippers of false gods, and put away their own lawful wives by an unrighteous divorce. The marriage tie was desecrated, and with it the sanctity of the home had gone. If ever there was a time when men's hearts might fail them it was now. Yet "the more the ungodly spake against God, the more these spake among themselves for God."[1] So far from being daunted or discouraged by the badness of the times, they were driven the more to honour and meditate upon the holy name of God; and their common love for Him and fear of Him drew them together in sweet intercourse, so that they spoke to each other on the matters nearest to their hearts.

"They that feared the Lord," he says, "spake one with another." It was their surest means, by God's grace, of resisting the temptations of their enemy, and so it is ours. It was the greatest earthly blessing of their lives, and so it is of ours. An earthly blessing indeed it ought scarcely to be called; for it reaches from earth to heaven. The Communion of Saints which is begun here will go on for ever and ever; only that, whereas now they who fear the Lord speak to one another of Him, hereafter He will Himself join their company, and they shall be one in Him and in the Father.

The Authorized Version reads, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another"; but the word "often" is omitted in the Revised Version, and does not occur in the original. It is one of those words that seem to add to, but in reality detract from,

[1] E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets.*

the meaning of the text. "Spake often one to another" admits of gaps in the fellowship. "Spake one with another" tells the whole story of their communication, for it marks the attitude rather than the occupation of a life. "They spake one with another." It is the great statement of fellowship, of the gathering together in a community of hearts holding the same treasure, of characters that were growing into the same likeness; it is the statement of a great necessity; darkness all around, light becomes focussed; evil spreading its ramifications on every hand, children of righteousness come close together.

I.

The Persons.

Who were they? They are characterized by two phrases: (1) "They that feared the Lord"; (2) "and that thought upon his name."

1. "They that feared the Lord"—those who had been brought to know Him as the sin-hating and sin-avenging God, to know Him as Him whose very nature it is to abhor sin, being of purer eyes than to behold evil or look upon iniquity. Every truth of revelation concurs in giving us those views of God and of ourselves which are suited to produce this reverential fear. Look at the universal dominion and the infinite holiness ascribed to God everywhere in His Word; must not these overawe the mind when brought to a proper and intelligent apprehension of them? Must they not lead the soul to reverential fear of the Divine majesty, holiness, and glory? Will not the result be that solemn awe, humble adoration, and jealous circumspection characteristic of the gracious soul, which lead him to act habitually as in the presence of the all-seeing and heart-searching God, and cause him to fear the frown, and desire the favour of God above everything else?

In the opening note of the Divine complaint, the prophet said: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" Here is a company that *have* "feared the Lord," and *have* "thought upon his name"; so that amid all the mass of

people who had lost the sense of fear of their Master, there was an Elect Remnant, a select few, who not only called Him "Master," but also feared Him. The thought of fear is linked, then, with the word "master," and with all that that word implies. If we speak of a master, we at once think of a servant; and while the relationship of the master to the servant is that of authority and will and guidance, the relation of the servant to the master is that of obedience and service. Bearing this in mind, we notice that service is looked upon here rather as condition than as action. Character is marked in this word, "They that feared the Lord"; they that lived within the conscious realm of the Divine, and responded to that claim; that number of units in the great crowd who recognized the Divine Kingship, not merely as theory, or as something of which they made a boast to other people, but as the power in which they lived their lives and spent all their days: "They feared the Lord." There were men and women all around making offerings, and crowding the courts of the Temple at the hour of worship. Among those who came, God detected the men and women who really feared, and He selected only the gifts of those who presented something—not as an attempt to make up what they lacked in character, but as an output of character, and as a revelation of what they were within themselves. "They feared the Lord."

¶ Another expression for that inward submission in which we commune with God is "the fear of God." To the Christian this fear is not a momentary horror at the mysterious power that is over his life. It is always possible for the creature moved by its love of life to escape from this emotion into renewed calm forgetfulness of God. But the Christian fear of God is rather that deep and joyful acknowledgment of God as the only mighty and living One, which we may and ought always to feel. "It is thus we must understand the fear mentioned in the Scriptures; it does not denote a fear or a terror lasting for an instant, but it is our whole life and being, walking in reverence and awe before God" (Luther, Erlangen edition, xxxiv. 174). "What we, following the Scriptures, call the fear of God, is not terror or dread, but an awe that holds God in reverence, and that is to remain in a Christian, just as a good child fears its father" (Luther, xvii. 349). Thus the Christian's fear of God is the reverence of the child for that Father within whose mighty care it feels itself still sheltered. The Christian fears the Father whom he recognizes in Christ, "not on account of the pain and punishment, as unchristian men

and the devil fear Him" (Luther, lvii. 56), but because he sees before his eyes the actual power of God giving him blessing; and he fears to take one step beyond the sphere of that blessed power "as a good child fears, and will not arouse, its father's anger, or do anything that might not please him" (Luther, li. 365). Here again we see that the communion of man with God can take place only as an experience caused in the man by God Himself. For any one can work up for himself those feelings of horror that arise from a sense of inevitable dependence on a power we dread; and such feelings are to be found, too, in any Christian life, for no Christian is perfect; but, on the other hand, that fear of God which looks at God Himself, and is therefore true communion with Him, arises only in the soul that experiences the emancipating power of the Gospel amid contact with the Christian brotherhood, through Christian training, custom, and preaching. But it is only complete when we have found in Christ the God that draws back to Himself even those who feel deeply estranged from Him by the sense of their own guilt. Inward trembling before the holy power of the Good can never cease to be part of man's communion with God. If we cease to fear God, we have lost our inward relation to Him. The communion of the Christian with God never succeeds in overcoming the inner opposition between fear and love.[1]

2. "And that thought upon his name." That name, with all the solemn and reverential fear it created in their souls, was still to them an object of intense delight. It was to them as ointment poured forth. The defence of its honour and glory became to them their greatest concern, the prime object, the regulating principle and motive of their whole life. Hence they thought upon it. It was ever present to them. When others spent their time in madly rushing after pleasure and earthly enjoyment, in seeking what to eat, drink, and put on, these sought the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, prayerfully planned and devised how they could best further the interests of the one, and secure for themselves and others the priceless blessings of the other. Where others found the service of God grievous and tiresome, a service of which they could only say that in it they afflicted their souls, and walked mournfully before God, because they had no delight in it, no sympathy of heart with its sacred duties, these found it a season of special enjoyment, a season of high festival and pleasure, a time in which they drew waters with joy from the

[1] W. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, 270.

wells of salvation. They joyed to go up to the house of God, to think upon His name and to inquire in His holy place, because there they had seen His glory, and had their souls fed with the finest of the wheat.

What a name that was on which they thought may be gathered from a study of the titles associated therewith in the mind of the Hebrew: *Jehovah-Jireh*—The Lord will provide; *Jehovah-Tsidkenu*—The Lord our righteousness; *Jehovah-Shalom*—The Lord send peace; *Jehovah-Nissi*—The Lord our banner; *Jehovah-Shammah*—The Lord is there. If we search the matter out for ourselves, we shall find that these people had a marvellous heritage in the name of Jehovah. He had revealed Himself by names continually, and there had been along the line of their history new beauty, new glory, perpetually breaking out by means of those very names by which God had approached them time after time. These people thought upon the name of the Lord—of His provision for them, His righteousness, His banner, the proof of love in His conflict with sin, His presence—and, thinking of these things, their nature was transformed into correspondence with His own, so that they became righteous, and they became peaceful, and they became quiet in the presence of their faithful God.

¶ They had the sublimest subject of contemplation. "His name"—boundless Power—eternal right—wisdom that cannot err and needs not to amend its plans—truth dazzling in its lustrous brightness—goodness essential and rejoicing in its own manifestations—love, fathomless, unsearchable, draining its own heart and pouring out its life-blood in sacrifice for the lost world—these are the glorious letters which spell out "his name"; and upon these they think and ponder, intenter than rapt student of the mysteries of Isis—more absorbed than decipherer of cabalistic lore. "That thought upon his name," and by the thought were lifted from the common to the royal, were enraptured and transformed; "that thought upon his name," until they heard it inspoken, and their whole being thrilled beneath the syllables of its grace and power—"merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"; "that thought upon his name," until, assimilated by the wondrous meditation, they felt the fingers of the forming hand writing it upon their own hearts—the new name—and rejoiced, in *that*, their second and inner christening, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."[1]

[1] W. M. Punshon, *Sermons*, ii. 279.

¶ The word "thought" is one of intense meaning, and I should like to trace it in one or two passages of Scripture in order that we may more clearly understand it.

In the 17th verse of the 13th chapter of Isaiah we read: "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it." The only purpose for which we have turned to this verse is that we may extract the word "regard" from it, and see how it is used in this particular case. The Medes will not "regard" silver—that is to say, that they will set no value on silver. The Medes, stirred up against the ancient people of God, will not be bought off by silver. They do not set any value upon it, they do not "regard" it. The connection between this thought and that of our text is centred in the fact that the Hebrew word translated "think" in Malachi is exactly the same word which is translated "regard" in Isaiah. They thought upon His name, they regarded His name, they set a value upon His name.

Take another case in which the same word is again translated "regard." Isaiah xxxiii. 8, "The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he *regardeth* no man." That is, he sets no value upon man. The word is identical with that translated in Malachi: "They that thought upon the Lord"—that is to say, what these people did not do concerning man, the Elect Remnant did concerning God. I do not say there is any connection between these passages; we are simply getting the light of them upon a particular word in our present study. They regarded God, they set a value upon Him. In the terrible day described by Isaiah the personal man was not regarded, he was accounted as "nothing worth," valueless; but this Elect Remnant set regard upon the name of the Lord; they did for that name what the Medes did not do for silver, and what was not done for man in the days of which Isaiah writes.

In the same prophecy a very remarkable case occurs. Isaiah liii. 3: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." "Esteemed" is the word; it is the same Hebrew word translated "thought" in Malachi. You see the word again almost more wonderfully presented here than in other instances. "We *esteemed* him not." We thought nothing of Him; we set no value upon Him; His worth in our sight was nothing, and we spurned Him from us. He came to His own, and they received Him not; they perceived no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But the Elect

Remnant esteemed the name of the Lord; they "thought upon his name"—they set a high value thereon.

To follow this thought a little further in order that we may get additional light upon it, turn to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, iv. 8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." The Greek word translated "think" here is a word which means "Take an inventory." What are the things of which men, as a rule, take an inventory? Things which they value; and Paul, in writing, is practically saying, "Do not reckon as riches things perishing; but those things which make you rich indeed, the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, take an inventory of these, keep your mind upon them, set a value upon them." In the Septuagint the translators have taken this word which Paul uses and have used it in the three cases in Isaiah—to which we have already referred—so that when you read, "These men *thought* on the name of the Lord," it is not a matter of little moment; they did not simply meditate upon His name, and meet together to endeavour to comprehend its deep riches. All this I believe they did; but their position as described by this word is far more wonderful than that. It is that they set value upon the name of the Lord, esteemed it, made an inventory in it, accounted it as their property, wealth, riches. It was the chief thing; nothing else was worth consideration to these faithful people. They took an inventory in the name of the Lord.[1]

II.

Their Motives.

What are the motives which lead to Christian fellowship? Four may be mentioned.

1. The first is the intense love and interest begotten in us when once the facts of redemption have taken possession of our heart. We profess to believe that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If we really believe

[1] G. Campbell Morgan, "*Wherein?*" 74.

it, is it conceivable that we can speak freely of the weather, of events of our day, of politics, of commerce, of literature, of science, and can absolutely close our lips on the one topic which is not of time but of eternity? Is there not something faulty if we cannot enjoy Christian intercourse with congenial souls such as may lead to our doing greater honour to God's most holy name?

¶ Whilst man is by nature a social being, it is only in the possession of a common religious life that the social principle and spirit find their highest expression and their unrestricted development. The need for friendly intercourse and fellowship is chiefly and most intensely felt in connection with the deepest and strongest feelings and aspirations and convictions of the soul; and there are no feelings or experiences which so vitally affect us as those of the religious life. Religious friendship and religious communion may, in truth, be claimed as almost essential to the culture and growth of personal religion. As a matter of fact and of history, religion has always shown itself as a social bond; in its higher and purer and more ethical forms, in particular, it has established and fostered, more or less fully, the sentiment of brotherhood among those who held a common faith and who aspired and struggled towards the same ideals. In the case of those who acknowledge in Christ the supreme revelation of the Divine, this has been an outstanding characteristic.

> We all are servants of one Master, Christ;
> Bound by one law, redeemed by one love,
> And every brow sealed with the self-same print
> Of blessèd brotherhood.[1]

2. The second motive is the truth of the Body of Christ. If each one of us is a member of Christ, is it conceivable that he has nothing to receive from other members? Look at the colours of the rainbow. Their beauty lies in their harmony. Is it not so in the Body of Christ? Surely each one of us has been made with some distinct idea in the mind of God, and to reflect some special ray of Divine light. It is only when these rays are combined that we have any real idea of the manifold wisdom of God. In every parish or community there is an exquisite variety of gift, of development, of power. Take any one body of men, and you will find a variety of spiritual gifts in them. Enlarge the field, and take the whole community—village, town, school, university

[1] J. M. Hodgson, *Religion: The Quest of the Ideal*, 95.

—and you will find a greater variety still. Enlarge still further, and take in the whole Church of Christ, and it becomes evident at once that the gifts of the whole body are needed if the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. A selfish, isolated religion, which contents itself with drawing stores from heaven for itself, as though it had no relation, either in giving or in receiving, with other men, is so spurious a form of Christianity that the very stores which it draws are likely to be corrupted. Only as we "speak one with another" under conditions laid down for us in the Word of God have we due security for the preservation of our own faith amid the temptations of the world and for the transmission of our heritage to successive and ever-increasing generations.

¶ All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God; and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.[1]

3. A third motive is corresponding spiritual experiences. Every student of his own heart has been amazed and delighted to discover the harmony of religious feelings which exists throughout the Church. As the veteran has revealed the history of his struggles, the juvenile soldier has felt his heart quivering with the sensations so graphically described by the aged warrior; as the thoughtful Christian has propounded his difficulties, how often have we felt them to be the very difficulties which have perplexed and disquieted our own minds; and as we have listened to the statement of the distractions which have marred and enfeebled the devotions of others, we have felt that the same

[1] *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. xxvi.

shadow has stretched over our own altar and prevented our view of the Saviour's benignant countenance.

¶ Religious life has a large element of feeling, and our feelings have a greater value when they are shared. They then become real sources of insight. We need to feel the common joy or grief in order to understand fully their inner meaning. The interaction of doing and feeling is a matter of very great practical importance. There is a danger of giving too great a predominance to Christian emotion. It is a very blessed thing to enjoy the feelings that can be evoked by the sharing of Christian experience; but the consequences of allowing ourselves the luxury of deep and strong emotions which evaporate without having produced any worthy effective action have often been pointed out by the psychologist. If we want to feel the joy and blessedness of the deepest common emotion, we ought to give very much more prominence to the life of common action. If we can work together for the things of the Kingdom, if we can combine to give a good and effective witness for Christ, and share with each other the toil, the patience, the disappointments, and the successes of common activity, we may then safely allow ourselves to taste to the full the blessedness of those deep emotional experiences which we have been taught to prize so highly.[1]

4. The fourth motive is one which is suggested by a knowledge of human nature. It is notorious that in every condition of life there are those who are stronger and those who are weaker. Some are born to lead, others seem bound to depend on those who are stronger than themselves. If so, is it not criminal if we keep to ourselves the Divine gift of strength, and refuse to give of our knowledge and experience to some weaker brother, or refuse to receive what some brother or sister has to impart to us?

¶ Throughout life Darwin was subject to violent paroxysms of pain, which often occasioned great alarm to his friends. He was never able to work consecutively for more than twenty minutes without interruption from these infirmities, which so enfeebled him that even a brief journey to London was exhausting. Burdened with extraordinary difficulties, he achieved his results by the exercise of the sternest resolution. His modesty was almost a weakness; and when he confessed, with touching simplicity, that he believed he had acted rightly in steadily following and devoting himself to science, those who revered him

[1] W. Bradfield, *Personality and Fellowship*, 195.

knew not which to admire the more, his great gifts or his incurable humility. He was fortunate in his friendships. The names of Wallace, Hooker, Scrope, and Lyell are associated with his fame; and the really impressive worth of these men was not so much their intellectual greatness as the grandeur of character, the unexampled forbearance, and the mutual assistance which distinguished them as coadjutors in a notable cause. Some votaries of science have shown themselves disastrously prejudiced and jealous; they have been more anxious for the priority of their personal claims than for the purity of their motive or the progress of knowledge. But this band of giants dwelt in a fellowship marred by no regrettable incidents, and strove toward the attainment of a great ideal, hand in hand and conjoined in heart, in honour preferring one another.[1]

III.

The Occasions.

What are the occasions on which Christian fellowship may be enjoyed?

1. They who fear the Lord may be said, most truly and most safely, to speak one to another when they perform in God's presence their solemn acts of worship. Would that we might oftener see those infallible signs of hearts engaged, the fixed earnest look, the humble reverent posture, the hearty response, the united Amen, which we do witness with thrilling joy on those rare occasions when our thoughts are specially solemnized for the work of worship! We have the firm assurance that God is then effectually present, softening, humbling, and elevating the minds of His servants.

One purpose which seems essentially involved in the possession of spiritual Christianity is the bearing witness for Christ. Those who, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, are clad in spiritual power are thus made mighty that they may be "witnesses unto God." This would seem to necessitate an organized system of testimony. The witness cannot be fully given either in the words of acknowledgment or in the deep heart-affection which prompts to the

[1] S. P. Cadman, *Charles Darwin and Other English Thinkers*, 38.

holy life. There must be palpable and public dedication—not only the understanding enlightened and the heart transformed, but new companionships to supersede the old, not only the head filled with the truth and the heart warmed with its omnipotence of love, but the hand cordial in its grasp and greeting for those who have received like precious faith and power. Disciples of the spirit of Nicodemus—with less excuse than he—may endeavour, under the shadows of the night, to come to Jesus; but their cowardice dishonours the Master, and enfeebles their own souls. Though the spirit of active persecution slumbers, no age of the world will be without its "Pharisees" who hinder; and the brand would be as disgraceful now as when it was originally affixed upon the recreant hearts of old—"Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." In some great rallying time of patriotism, the trusted men are not those who trim between opposing parties as the balance of interest inclines, and whose defection would surprise neither the one nor the other. In some Thermopylae of a nation's liberties, or some Marathon of its triumph, they are the crowned if they live; and, if they fall, they are inurned amid a country's tears, who "look proudly to Heaven from the death-bed of fame." There is no armour for the back in the Christian's panoply Divine; and they are the trusted soldiers in Immanuel's army who are not stragglers on a foray, or free-lances in a guerilla warfare, but resolute bands in the sacramental host which is marshalled for the conquest of the world.

¶ The marching orders of the spiritual world are often stern enough, as stern sometimes, and as seeming hopeless, as those for the Balaclava charge, or of a forlorn hope.

Here, again, let us turn to our New Testament. We get a glimpse there of life's marching orders as they were interpreted by one of its chief characters. Have we grumblers, comfortably housed meanwhile, with families and friends, with incomes, with all our easy securities, ever tried to picture to ourselves the actual state of things which Paul describes as his daily condition? "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen . . . in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and

thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness!" And this career winds up in the Roman prison, and then, if report speaks truly, as one of Nero's victims, going out as one of those human flambeaux set alight to illuminate his gardens. Plainly not much provision for the human comforts here! And yet the man was content and joyful. He was a soldier on the march, God's soldier, with God's orders in his mind, and God's comfort in his soul. And these are the marching orders for you and for me. They have been good enough for millions of souls, who have been happy in the possession of them; happy, not from fancy conjunctions of prosperous circumstances, but because they felt themselves to be here to become what God would have them be, and to accomplish what God would have them do.[1]

2. Still, we must in this life ever be more closely attached to some particular Christians than to others; and the number of every man's dear and intimate friends must of necessity be small. Yet it is to these that the words of the text especially apply: "They that feared the Lord spake one with another." This should be true of the society of Christians in general: but it is, and ought to be, much more so of those who take sweet counsel together, and are bound to one another by the closest ties of personal friendship. It can hardly be told how great is their loss who know not the comfort of Christian friends: in youth, more particularly, he who is without them loses the most powerful earthly instrument by which he is saved from temptation, and encouraged to good. Parents or teachers can do little in comparison; because the difference of age deprives what they say of much of its weight, and destroys at the same time that equality which makes the influence of a friend so much less suspected, and listened to, therefore, so much more readily. Equality of age and similarity in outward circumstances, draw men most closely to one another, and therefore give them additional opportunities for becoming fully acquainted with each other's characters. Friends are sharers together in each other's amusements and pleasures; they are together in those hours of free and careless mirth which the presence of persons of a different age would instantly check. At such times every one's experience can inform him how easily mirth may be turned into sin; how easily the heart may be hardened, and the conscience dulled by the conversation and

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties* (1914), 17.

example of unchristian associates. Whereas Christian friends gain strength, and impart it to one another in the very midst of their temptations, and even of their falls. Growth in grace is ever gradual: and Christians in their youth are somewhat like the good men who lived in the earlier ages, or in what may be called the youth of the world: that is, their consciences are less enlightened than they become at a more advanced age; they are less exalted in their notions of what they should not do, and of what Christ would love to find in them. There is much, therefore, in their lives that requires amendment: but, if they are Christians in earnest, they gradually lead one another on to higher views; a knowledge of their mutual faults makes them unreserved to each other; they are not afraid of saying all that is in their hearts; they make known to each other their particular difficulties and temptations; they feel that they are engaged in the same struggle; and each is often able to give assistance to the other on one point, whilst in others he may himself require to be aided in his turn. So they go on from strength to strength, till they come together in maturer years to a more advanced state of Christian obedience: with natural faults repressed or subdued, with more enlarged views of the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus, and a more enlightened sense of the claims which God has upon the entire devotion of their hearts to His service.

¶ No doubt it requires a very genuine humility for some men to anticipate getting any good from the company of people who have not been blessed with their own educational or social privileges, but it is one of the cases where assuredly God gives grace to the humble. Many a Christian saint can testify that he has received, and, so far as he is able to judge, received far more than he has given, from fellowship with some apparently extremely unlikely person into whose company he has been thrown, and with whom he has talked and prayed about the things of God.[1]

¶ In a letter that she wrote in 1873 to Mr. J. W. Cross, whom she married after the death of George Henry Lewes, George Eliot showed how strong her feeling for religion and her craving for spiritual fellowship had become. "All the great religions of the world," she writes, "historically considered, are rightly the objects of deep reverence and sympathy. They are the record of

[1] W. Bradfield, *Personality and Fellowship*, 174.

spiritual struggles, which are the types of our own. This is to me pre-eminently true of Hebrewism and Christianity, on which my own youth was nourished. And in this sense I have no antagonism towards any religious belief, but a strong overflow of sympathy. Every community, met to worship the highest good (which is understood to be expressed by God) carries me along with its current; and if there were not reasons against my following such an inclination, I should go to church or chapel constantly, for the sake of the delightful emotions of fellowship which come over me in religious assemblies—the very nature of such assemblies being the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law which is to lift us into a willing obedience and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse."[1]

¶ The last of his Church Congress papers, that on *The Communion of Saints*, seems peculiarly associated with Peterborough, and is published in a volume of Peterborough Sermons. The subject, too, is one so very dear to himself. He had an extraordinary power of realizing this Communion. It was his delight to be alone at night in the great Cathedral, for there he could meditate and pray in full sympathy with all that was good and great in the past. I have been with him there on a moonlight evening when the vast building was haunted with strange lights and shades, and the ticking of the great clock sounded like some giant's footsteps in the deep silence. Then he had always abundant company. Once a daughter in later years met him returning from one of his customary meditations in the solitary darkness of the chapel at Auckland Castle, and she said to him, "I expect you do not feel alone?" "Oh no," he said, "it is full," and as he spoke his face shone with one of his beautiful smiles.[2]

[1] *Life of George Eliot*, by J. W. Cross, ii. 365.

[2] A. Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, i. 312.

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Religious Conversation.

They that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.—Mal. iii. 16.

It is the tendency of our time to decry what is called religious conversation. It is in great disrepute with those who desire to be thought sensible men; and, as a matter of fact, it has become almost extinct, except in certain narrow circles, where it survives (for the most part) in a form by no means calculated to attract others towards it.

I.

The Opportunities.

Many of those who must fail in making religious conversation profitable have yet a good object in view in their attempts to cherish it. They have felt that it is a strange thing, and one not altogether seemly, that people who are bent upon the same pursuit—truth, holiness, and salvation, their own and that of others—should never give the slightest indication to each other in word that this is so; should never allude, in the presence of their best and nearest friends, to that which is their chief hope and highest interest; should be content to talk as if this chief concern had no existence for them, and be as much ashamed of having its existence in them discovered as if it were something discreditable or degrading. They have felt that there must be a fault somewhere, if this state of things is unavoidable and irremediable. They have observed how different was the conduct, in this respect, of the early Christians; how they, in their briefest letters upon the commonest subjects, and much more therefore in their private oral communications with those who shared in the same feeling, could not refrain from constant allusions to things spiritual and

eternal: and they have painfully felt how much they are losing, day by day, both of assistance and of comfort, from a total silence, in the presence of experienced and Christian men, upon a point on which they so much need and would be so deeply thankful for either advice or encouragement.

(1) Many a young man would be really grateful if, without any attempt at undue influence, without any assumption of superior position, with the exquisite sympathy that is born of God, and comes from the live coal from the altar having touched his own lips, an elder brother would speak straight out to a younger brother from time to time on the love of God in Christ Jesus and the things of the world to come. Sometimes at an early stage a shipwreck of faith or life might be avoided by the tactful and judicious friendship of one who has himself a firm hold of the Rock of Ages.

(2) But this "speaking one with another," may be not merely as between older and younger men, but as between equals, contemporaries, friends. Would not light be thrown upon many a passage of the Word of God which has never been realized, on many a difficulty in life, if, without cant and unreality, one could just simply speak on spiritual matters with a friend?

¶ John Wesley saw the need of this when he set on foot the class system which has been the strength, even if sometimes the weakness, of Methodism; and I plead that the Church of England should supply what is needed for her children without forcing them to seek outside her ranks the Christian fellowship for which they hanker. Classes or meetings for the study of the Word of God, conferences on the lessons of Church history, discussions on Christian missions with a view to learning and teaching in turn what God is doing in other parts of the world—all this, if carried out with prayer and as a downright spiritual work, would be found further to illustrate this principle of Christian intercourse. Its special methods will vary, but the thing itself can be ignored only at our peril.[1]

¶ People are unwilling to talk about religion because it seems almost a profanity. They cannot bear to expose their most sacred feelings at all. They could not find words to utter reverently and truly "thoughts too deep for words." All the tact and wisdom the Holy Spirit gives are indeed needed here. For the holy things ought not to be flung to the dogs. It is only in the most sacred

[1] E. Jacob, in *Oxford University Sermons*, 380.

confidence of friendship that the best things can be said. There is, moreover, a danger (and what precious thing is not dangerous?) of an over-exposed conscience becoming callous and blatant. Most Christians in most churches have been stopped by these dangers so far as actual personal conversation with each other is concerned. Some have left the talking to the minister in the pulpit. People can listen in company to what they could not bear to have said to them direct; and, stranger still, a man can speak out to a great congregation heart secrets that he could not sit in his study and tell to his dearest friend. Some, again, have left the talking to be done in confession in the presence of God under the seal of absolute secrecy. Some have waited till they found a friend who made confidence possible; while others have found themselves able to tell their heart to an entire stranger whom they thought they would never meet again.

The matter is so vital to religious progress that we must at all costs cling to our dearly-won habit of talking to one another about religious experience, and, therefore, must encourage people to begin to do so when they first begin to share the Christian life. Certainly it is easier for them to do so then than it ever will be later. There is an instinct to open the heart and trust others at first, the power of which fades quite away if it is suppressed.[1]

II.

The Topics.

What was the subject of their discourse? The world's politics, and the world's pleasures? The last entertainment, or the latest scandal? The newest book, or the latest fashion? It is interesting to note how every age is but a repetition of the last. Men in those days had their feasts, where the viol and the tabret and the harp played an important part, and where they sat over their wine until they had redness of eyes; and they would no doubt then, as now, hold up the glass to the light, and praise its amber or ruby colour, commending its bouquet and flavour, and speaking of the vintage whence it came. And over the wine they would talk of the sports and games, the feastings and pleasures of the hour, and many a jest would go round the board, followed by laughter and glee. Was it of such things

[1] W. Bradfield, *Personality and Fellowship*, 190.

as these that "they that feared the Lord" spoke when they met together, "and the Lord hearkened and heard"? Women had in those days their ornaments, "their cauls, and round tires like the moon, their chains, and bracelets, and mufflers; their bonnets and broad bands, and tablets and earrings, their rings, and changeable suits of apparel; their mantles, and wimples, and crisping pins, their glasses and fine linen, and hoods and veils." Was it of these that the women who "feared the Lord spake one with another"? Certainly not. The Lord would hardly have thought it worth while to bow the heavens and come down "to hearken and hear" and to keep "a book of remembrance" for conversation such as this. It was of higher and better things than these that the holy men and women of old spoke: of God and His grace, of His mercy and goodness, of His judgments against sin, of His lovingkindness to His people.

1. The topics of Christian conversation are as varied as the experiences of the Christian life. But these are sure to be leading topics, all centring in the Unspeakable Gift.

(1) *His Name.*—We can image the men of Malachi's day who feared the Lord saying, "There are fearful blasphemers abroad. Men speak and act as if truth were a lie, and righteousness a dream. 'Where is the promise of His coming'? they cry scornfully, as we proclaim Him; while we wait and watch for His judgments, and still He stays His hand. But there *is* a righteous Lord reigning in the heart of all this discord and confusion. There, through the gloom, His burning eye seems glowing on us. Yes! He is there, living, reigning, until all that resists Him is crushed beneath His feet. Sin He hates, and will confound; purity He loves, and will glorify. Stand fast then; be strong and of a good courage. Let men laugh or scorn as they will, the Lord our God is a holy Lord, and will magnify His holiness in us and before mankind."

(2) *His Power.*—His boliness, they would say, is not a name, a word; it is an infinite force. His awful power will make it a reality before these mockers and scorners, who are but as the chaff which is driven before His breath. With all the pomp of His power He is prepared to uphold our witness, and to vindicate our faith. And were there not moments when for them, too,

the veil lifted, and they saw ranged round them the gleaming cohorts of God's angels? Earth would seem to them at such moments but as an ant-hill of petty and malignant schemers; while around, above, beneath them, filling the infinite spaces, were the glorious powers of the Lord.

(3) *His Promises.*—In dark nights the stars are most blessed guides. And in sad seasons, when earth and heaven are buried in gloom, the earnest few gaze on the stars which peer faintly through the darkness, and watch—oh, how earnestly!—for the breaking of the day. What God hath said is then most momentous. God is veiled from us. We see Him not; has He left the world to be the devil's own empire? weary, has He gone, and abandoned it to its doom? And then the stars of promise shine forth. Light stored for dark hours is treasured for us in the promises, and men draw it thence to glow and shine. Those who pore alone over the promises, when all around them is wrapped in gloom, become stern and fanatical. These men "spake one with another," and a strength which had a heart of love in it, entered into their souls.

(4) *His Truth.*—Can God suffer Himself to be mocked by the world's folly and wickedness? The promises! Where are the seals? "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things." In the depths of the buried ages those stars were led forth that man at last might rejoice in them. He made man to be king on the throne of the creation. Will He suffer the devil finally to defile and deface his crown? "He keepeth truth for ever." He made earth, He made heaven, for His children, and children He will have to inhabit them. Through struggle, sacrifice, anguish, death, He has sought and found them; He will never lose them more. The "agony and bloody sweat" are the seals of His promises; the breadth and depth of that suffering and sacrifice is the measure of the immutability of His truth.

¶ Truth is not ours to bate and pare down. Truth is God's; it has God's majesty inherent within it, and it will convert the souls of men, even when it seems rudest and most repelling; and it will do so for this one reason—because it is God's truth, and because we through the grace of God have boldness and faith to put our trust in it.[1]

[1] F. W. Faber, *Notes on Doctrinal and Spiritual Subjects*, i. 368.

¶ In course of the speech which he delivered in the House of Commons on the Bradlaugh question on 26th April, 1883, Mr. Gladstone used these words: "Truth is the expression of the Divine mind, and however little our feeble vision may be able to discern the means by which God may provide for its preservation, we may leave the matter in His hands; and we may be sure that a firm and courageous application of every principle of equity and of justice is the best method we can adopt for the preservation and influence of truth."[1]

2. But there are cautions to be observed.

(1) We must be careful not to allow religious conversation under common circumstances to run into argument. Argument is very right in its proper place; but argument requires a calmness which is seldom found without some previous preparation of the mind. If conversation—such as it usually is—grows argumentative, it is almost certain to lead on to what is not only useless, but unfavourable to the eliciting of truth, rather, indeed, to much that is really unchristian, and which will afterwards be cause of much regret.

¶ Oh, the unmitigable curse of controversy! Oh, the detestable passions that corrections and contradictions kindle up to fury in the proud heart of man! Eschew controversy, my brethren, as you would eschew the entrance to hell itself. Let them have it their own way. Let them talk. Let them write. Let them correct you. Let them traduce you. Let them judge and condemn you. Let them slay you. Rather let the truth of God itself suffer, than that love suffer. You have not enough of the divine nature in you to be a controversialist. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not: by whose stripes ye were healed. Heal me, prays Augustine again and again, of this lust of mine of always vindicating myself.[2]

(2) And, above all, the conversation must be absolutely real. Hypocrisy, unreality, exaggeration are no elements of the speaking one to another so commended by Malachi. It is a difficult matter often to draw the line between these two,—"a time to

[1] *Thoughts from the Writings and Speeches of William Ewart Gladstone*, 61.

[2] A. Whyte, *Bible Characters*: Ahithophel to Nehemiah, 124.

speak, and a time to be silent." As to Christian conversation, it should, before all things else, be true and then natural; only then can it do good. In general company silence may frequently be best; religion dragged in unsuitably defeats a good intention, and repels instead of attracting. Only let the silence be from wisdom not cowardice, and let it seek to turn the conversation into improving channels, though not directly religious. The world feels when there is a solid basis of principle beneath the most common talk,—like the ointment of the right hand it "bewrayeth itself." A man will generally do most good by first gaining an influence through quiet, unobtrusive demeanour and acts of unselfish kindness, and then speech will come with power. A little word so commended is like a point with the weight of all the sword to drive it home, while a world of talk, if the life lags behind, is like chaff; this "talk of the lips" also "tendeth to penury." Cases may arise where opportunity is pressing and sin flagrant, and a man must speak at all hazards.

The Pharisees were rebuked for making their religion public. Daniel would have sinned had he made his private. So different is duty when religion is popular or unpopular. Sometimes a man has no religion if he does not show it; sometimes very little if he obtrudes it. One thing we must always show—the fruits in the life.

There are things in religion not for common talk, which a delicate mind will no more thrust in than it will its heart's deepest affections. David says, "Come near all ye that fear God: I will tell what he hath done for my soul." Those that "fear God" are invited, and they must "come near." As the poet says of grief, so of religion here: "let her be her own mistress still." Claudius says: "My son, let not pietisers but pious men be thy companions. The true fear of God in the heart is like the sun which shines and warms though it does not speak"; and what Johnson says of all conversation applies specially to that which is Christian: "It is happiest when there is no competition and no vanity, but a quiet interchange of sentiments."

Much must depend on Christian temperament, much on circumstances; only let us never speak for display, and never be silent through fear.[1]

[1] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 126.

¶ Dr. Walter C. Smith, the poet-preacher of the Free Church of Scotland, spoke, in his closing address as Moderator of the General Assembly in the Jubilee Year, 1893, of the fellowship of the saints, and declared that, if brethren who differed on some points would only commune together on the real and essential matter, they would be astonished to find how complete was their harmony down in the depths of the life that is in Christ. "Many years ago," he added, "I met on a Highland road one of 'The Men,' as they were called, who have exercised so large an influence in that part of our Church. He had learned to regard me with profound distrust; I may even say that he thought me about the most dangerous person then within our borders. But we got into conversation, and sat down on a wall by the roadside, and I soon found that he was a good man, a devoted servant of the Lord Jesus, from whose experience there was not a little that I could learn. Had we discussed and disputed as we might have done, I fear it would have been a barren meeting to us both. But I look back on that hour under the shadow of Cairngorm as one of the best in all my days, when two souls, wayfaring here amid clouds and mists and misunderstandings, met and recognized one another, and saw the shadows flee away ere they parted. Very likely he still thought me far wrong on some points, but he did not think me nearly so dangerous as he had done at first; and I learnt to regard him as a true servant of our common Lord, though he was a good deal in the dark about certain things. May I add that since that day I have often wished to see some of our Highland friends who stand in doubt of some of their Lowland brethren seated side by side of them on that same wall, grey with lichens and mosses, not to debate and discuss knotty points, but to commune of the things that belong to the kingdom and its peace?"

III.

The Listening God.

1. "The Lord hearkened, and heard" them. He knew for what purpose they were convened. He smiled on their conferences and took note of their wishes, and, if they did not succeed in stemming the tide of apostasy, they had the comfort that in doing their best the Unseen Recorder of their counsels would countenance their labours and reward them according to their faithfulness.

It is not merely "The Lord heard," but "the Lord *hearkened*, and heard." The watchfulness of God is represented as strained, as it were, to its utmost tension in order to hear everything. It is the attitude of jealous guardianship. It is the attitude of the mother as she lovingly listens to her children's voices, and is quick to note the slightest cry of distress, and to run to assist in the instant of need. It is the highest kind of guardianship, not the guardianship of covenants, though God's covenant cannot be broken. But this is a higher guardianship than that of covenants. It is the guardianship of love and delight, the guardianship of a delightful treasure, to lose which would be to make a void in the raptures of infinite joy.

2. God hears our conversation. Are we always aware of this? If there are any who can think with comfort of that record of words spoken in His love and fear, must not others tremble when they think of their words? Who has been the better, let each of us ask ourselves, for our possessing the gift of speech? Has it been used by us for the communication of good or for the communication of evil? Will there be no one who may rise up in the judgment to declare that, but for us, he might have remained ignorant of evil, that at least by our help he might have been enabled to escape it, and that we withheld that help, if we did not communicate that knowledge? Let us judge ourselves, one and all, for indeed we have cause to do so, if perhaps, in God's great mercy, we may not be judged. Let us remember who said that for every idle word which men should speak they should give account in the day of judgment. Of all the sayings written down from His lips in the Book of God, none surely is so terrible in its sound as that which declares, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

3. It is striking to notice the prophet's picture of the minuteness of the interest which God takes in this God-fearing society. Literally, the words of the prophet are: "Then they that feared the Lord spake—a man to his friend." Even their private conversation, the word by the wayside, God was hearkening for, and attending to. Every word out of this spiritual community, though it were only a casual word, would reflect the spirit of the

community, and so be precious to God. The whole circle of such a life would become sacred to the Father of all who watches over it from centre to circumference. We are reminded of the words of the greater Teacher, which these in some measure anticipate: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Whenever they that feared the Lord spoke, a man to his friend, the Lord hearkened and heard it all with loving interest and with infinite sympathy.

¶ When the spring comes, the oak-tree with its thousands upon thousands of leaves blossoms all over. The great heart of the oak-tree remembers every remotest tip of every farthest branch, and sends to each the message and the power of new life. And yet we do not think of the heart of the oak-tree as if it were burdened with such multitudinous remembrance. It is simply the thrill of the common life translated into these million forms. . . . Somewhat in that way it seems to me that we may think of God's remembrance of His million children. . . . That patient sufferer, that toilsome worker, are far-off leaves on the great tree of His life; far-off, and yet as near to the beating of His heart as any leaf on all the tree. He remembers them as the heart remembers the finger-tips to which it sends the blood. . . . If any doubt about Him, issuing from them, stops up the channel so that He cannot get to them, He waits behind the hindrance, behind the doubt, and tries to get it away, and feels the withering of the unbelieving, unfed leaf as if a true part of Himself were dying. And when the obstacle gives way, and the doubt is broken, and the path is once more open, it is almost with a shout which we can hear that the life-blood leaps to its work again.[1]

IV.

The Book of Remembrance.

1. Not only did God hearken and hear, but "a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." This writing in the book of remembrance involves not only preservation, but preservation grounded on the Divine approbation. Every word that the Lord heard was to be written in this book, and preserved for the future.

[1] Phillips Brooks.

All holy thoughts and all holy words belong not only to the present, but to the eternal future as well.

Never a holy thought has been lost in the history of the world, nor can be lost. Never a holy word has disappeared. They are all preserved. It is not the cleverness of an idea that gives it immortality, but its Divineness. There are clever things that will pass away with contempt, to the astonishment of the clever people who uttered them. It is not eloquence that can ensure immortality. It is holiness and purity and truth. And while many an outburst of eloquence from silver tongues shall pass away as empty sound into space, the broken, earnest words spoken by a poor illiterate Christian man to his Christian friend by the wayside will never die, for they are written in the book of remembrance.

2. What, then, does it mean to us to have our names and our words recorded in God's book of remembrance? It means that an earnest, zealous, Christ-loving, Christ-serving life, and its works of patience and faith, are deemed by Heaven the things best worth recording, and best deserving to be kept in remembrance. In those higher courts they are not absorbed and excited with the things that we poor mortals go mad about, with the pomps and splendours and vanities of the human panorama, the stage shows, the garish lights, the kaleidoscopic changes; they are not mad with curiosity to watch the rise and fall of millionaires and great houses. Possibly they are not so profoundly interested as we are in the movements of kings and rulers, in the startling speeches of politicians, and in the prospects of political parties, and certainly not in the revelations of the criminal court, the scandals of high life, and the result of the latest football match. A young man in the city steadfastly resisting its temptations and keeping himself undefiled for Jesus' sake; a maiden bringing her life and laying it at the Master's feet, and vowing to love Him first and best; a girl in the shop or factory adorning her Christian profession amidst unchristian workmates; a business man holding his conscience and integrity amid all the shady doings and unveracities of the market and commercial life; a woman bearing her cross, burden, thorn in the flesh, without complaining; a man of any sort daring to be a Daniel in his

convictions, and not ashamed to confess in any company that he is a servant of God and Jesus Christ; and the faithful workers in every field who are sowing the seed, spreading the life, and working to extend Christ's redeeming purpose and Kingdom—these are the things which the heavenly penmen note down, not one of them is forgotten or overlooked, every one of them is treasured up against the all-rewarding day when He shall bring out His jewels.

¶ Writing in "a book of remembrance" recalls a custom of the Persians. We find in the sixth chapter of Esther that it was usual to enter in certain records the names of those who deserved well of the king, with a notice of their meritorious deeds, to the intent that they might be rewarded. It was thus that Mordecai was brought under the notice of King Ahasuerus in a sleepless night when he read the records of his kingdom for his amusement. In like manner the names and actions of the righteous, their sorrows and sufferings for righteousness' sake, are written in a book before God. "Put my tears into thy bottle," says the psalmist. "Are they not all in thy book?" Their names were inscribed long before in "the book of life"; and now all they say or do which is approved of the Master finds a place in "the book of remembrance." The word in season spoken to the weary, as well as the cup of cold water given for His sake to a disciple. Nay, their thoughts are there, too: "for them that thought upon his name."[1]

If love in its silence be greater, stronger
  Than million promises, sighs, or tears—
I will wait upon Him a little longer
  Who holdeth the balance of our years.

Little white clouds like angels flying,
  Bring the spring with you across the sea—
Loving or losing, living or dying,
  Lord, remember, remember me!

[1] C. D. Bell, *The Name above Every Name*, 92.

A Peculiar Treasure.

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A Peculiar Treasure.

And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure [A.V. in that day when I make up my jewels]; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.—Mal. iii. 17.

Little or nothing is known historically of the prophet Malachi. It is not even certain that a prophet of that name ever lived, as the name means simply "my messenger." But if he lived, the time, the place, the circumstances of his birth are all unknown. We know nothing of his ancestors and nothing of his descendants if he had any. Like a meteor he starts up suddenly in the horizon of the Church, and, after running a brief career of exceeding brightness, he disappears as suddenly, leaving no trace behind except the few pages of thrilling prophecy with which the Old Testament closes.

If the Book of Malachi is the last prophetic book in the Old Testament, the Book of Nehemiah is the last historical book, and it would be an advantage to read these two books together, for they refer to the same period in the history of Israel. It was a period of fearful religious degeneracy. The long captivity of seventy years in a land full of idols, of a base degrading heathenism, far away from the Temple with its sacred ordinances, had exerted a most baneful influence on Israel and loosened the bonds which bound the nation to Jehovah. The abominations so sternly denounced by Nehemiah in his book are precisely the same as those denounced by Malachi in his book. Nehemiah as civil governor employs the rod of authority and punishes the evil-doers, while Malachi as a prophet warns, admonishes, and threatens in the name of Jehovah.

Wide and deep, however, as the degeneracy was, there were still some who feared the Lord, and thought upon His name, and trusted in His faithfulness in spite of the disorder and confusion

of which they were the daily witnesses. What they saw around them made them draw closer together; they would often meet in secret to commend themselves to God in prayer, as well as to cheer one another with words of hope and consolation; and they were so blessed from above in the use of such means of mutual encouragement, as to be able to hold fast their integrity. The interest with which God looked on these "little ones"—this handful of faithful souls in a dark time—how strikingly expressed! So touched was He with the thoughts and feelings and prayers that were breathed by them,—sounds sweet in any circumstances, but still sweeter in this case in contrast with the strife and violence of the outside world,—that He is represented as causing their names to be written in a book, as if to make sure of their being kept in remembrance. And of the interest He felt in them we have still stronger evidence in the words of the text, where He says that He would claim them as His own in that day when He should bring together in its most perfect state all that was most valuable, all that was most worthy of being owned by Him, all that He would deign to store up among His most precious possessions.

Let us try to place ourselves beside Malachi, that we may understand this gracious promise of God; and may we be encouraged to examine ourselves and see whether we belong to the peculiar treasure which is His and which He has promised to spare in the great Day.

I.

The Judgment of God.

"The day."

The translation is a little difficult. Literally the words mean "In the day that I do" (or "act"). G. A. Smith translates, "In the day that I rise to action."

It is the Day of the Lord, the Day of the appearing and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without entering upon disputed ground, it will suffice to say that we all look for some sort of termination to the present state of things, some period

when the present strife between good and evil shall come to an end, and when the separation shall take place between those who serve the Lord and those who serve Him not. We may differ as to the manner how and the time when, but we are all agreed as to the fact. And it is an object of most pleasing contemplation to the Christian that, whether it come during his own stay upon the earth or not, still it will usher in a great and glorious time for him; it will bring with it the perfection of his nature, the completed likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ, the redemption of his body; and it will bring with it bright and glorious things for the world, indeed we may say (following the statement of St. Paul), for the universal creation of God; for he tells us that the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

1. First, there will be a judgment of *sins* on that day; and at that judgment many will accuse Christians. Many, at least, may be supposed to do so. Satan, for example, will—the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them before God day and night (Rev. xii. 10). And conscience will, which even now compels us to exclaim, "Iniquities, I must confess, prevail against me" (Ps. lxv. 3). And may not fellow-sinners maintain that, as to this forbidden fruit, it was we that beguiled them, and made them eat? But, worst of all, when the books of God are opened they will show what Satan cannot, no, nor self either, even the every sin of every sinner.

¶ This used to be a well-known fact; and daily still, in certain edifices, steeple-house, joss-houses, temples sacred or other, everywhere spread over the world, we hear some dim mumblement of an assertion that such is still, what it was always and will forever be, the fact: but meseems it has terribly fallen out of memory nevertheless; and, from Dan to Beersheba, one in vain looks out for a man that really in his heart believes it. In his heart he believes, as we perceive, that scrip will yield dividends: but that Heaven too has an office of account, and unerringly marks down, against us or for us, whatsoever thing we do or say or think, and treasures up the same in regard to every creature,—this I do not so well perceive that he believes. Poor blockhead, no: he reckons that all payment is in money, or approximately representable by money; finds money go a strange course; disbelieves the parson and his Day of Judgment; discerns not that there is any judg-

ment except in the small or big debt court; and lives (for the present) on that strange footing in this Universe. The unhappy mortal, what is the use of his "civilizations" and "useful knowledges," if he have forgotten that beginning of human knowledge; the earliest perception of the awakened human soul in this world; the first dictate of Heaven's inspiration to all men? I cannot account him a man any more; but only a kind of human beaver, who has acquired the art of ciphering.[1]

2. But there will be a judgment of *services* as well as of sins; and at that judgment also many will accuse Christians. Satan will say, "Lord, their brightest deeds were marred by sin, their best by shortcoming. I marked them well, and watched them often. They never once did good and sinned not." And, as he speaks, so likewise will a multitude of others also. But *God's book of remembrance* will also accuse them; for He has a book for services as well as one for sins. We read about it here, where it is written, that "they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (ver. 16). This, some might say, is comforting. Ah! but that remembrance-book of services will, of course, just show them as they are—all spotted, wrinkled, blemished, and defiled, mere rags of righteousness, and filthy rags. What, in these circumstances, will the Judge do?

¶ Slowly and painlessly consciousness returned. He looked about him and remembered. It seemed but a moment, and yet the life he had lived on earth was as far from him as if he had died a century ago. In the stillness and the measureless quiet which enfolded him after those last agonizing hours he knew that he had already entered into rest. So deep was the peace which fell softly as if from the vast heights above him that he felt no curiosity and was without fear. He was in a new life and he must find his place in it, but he was content to wait; and while he waited his thought went swiftly back to the days when, a little child, he looked up at the sky and wondered if the stars were the lights in the streets of heaven. One by one the years rose out of the depths of his memory and he recalled, step by step, all the way he had come; childhood, youth, manhood, and age. He read with deepening interest the story of his life—all his thoughts, his words, the things he had done and left undone. And as he read

[1] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, No. v.

he knew what was good and what was ill; everything was clear, not only in the unbroken record of what he had been, but in a sudden perception of what he was. At last he knew himself. And while he pondered one stood beside him, grave and calm and sweet with the purity that is perfect strength. Into the face which turned toward him, touched with the light of immortal joy, he looked up and asked, "When shall I be judged?"

And the answer came: "You have judged yourself. You may go where you will."[1]

II.

The Judgment that Spares.

"I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

The need of such a promise as this is very urgent, and never more so than at the present time. Saints might say, as they often do, "Ah! but a judgment-day will be very awful—awful, whatever else. Think of its hopes as we may, we cannot forget its terrors; we cannot forget that the day when the Lord will make up His jewels will be one of scrutiny and testing trials—a day of fire that shall 'try every man's work of what sort it is'" (1 Cor. iii. 13), "and burn up all that is not 'gold, silver, and precious stones.' It must be a dreadful, unsparing day for sinners; and what else are we? Our own hearts condemn us, and God is greater than our hearts; He knoweth all things." Well, to hush these fears, we have this promise given us of God, "And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

The Judge of all the earth will surely do what is right. He will spare those only who can be spared in righteousness. He will not call evil good, and good evil, to arrive in this way at an unrighteous judgment. He will spare only those whose *best* the blood of Jesus clears, as well as those whose *worst* the blood of Jesus covers.

¶ Being moved by His own free mercy and goodness, even in the same love in which He sent His Son, the beloved, into the world, to seek and save the lost; on the 1st day of the second month, in the evening, in the year, according to the common

[1] H. W. Mabie, *Parables of Life*, 27.

account, 1689, being alone in my chamber, the Lord brake in upon me unexpectedly, quick as lightning from the heavens, and as a righteous, all-powerful, all-knowing, and sin-condemning Judge; before whom my soul, as in the deepest agony, trembled, was confounded and amazed, and filled with such awful dread as no words can reach or declare.

My mind seemed plunged into utter darkness, and eternal condemnation appeared to enclose me on every side, as in the centre of the horrible pit—never to see redemption thence, or the face of Him in mercy, whom I had sought with all my soul. But in the midst of this confusion and amazement, where no thought could be formed or any idea retained, save eternal death possessing my whole man, a voice was formed and uttered in me:—"Thy will, O God, be done: if this be Thy act alone, and not my own, I yield my soul to Thee." In conceiving these words from the Word of Life I quickly found relief: there was all-healing virtue in them; and the effect was so swift and powerful that, even in a moment, all my fears vanished, as if they had never been, and my mind became calm and still, and simple as a little child; the day of the Lord dawned, and the Sun of Righteousness arose in me, with Divine healing and restoring virtue in His countenance, and He became the centre of my mind.

In this wonderful operation of the Lord's power, denouncing judgment in tender mercy, and in the hour of my deepest concern and trial, I lost my old self, and came to the beginning of the knowledge of Him, the Just and Holy One, whom my soul had longed for.[1]

1. "I will spare them," says God, "as a man spareth his own son"; in other words, "I will spare them fondly, I will spare them affectionately"—not as a judge spares a stranger, whom he dismisses from his bar, but as a father spares a son, whom he takes to his bosom. This is a noteworthy fact or feature in the case. It would be a little thing comparatively to be merely spared—spared, with no feeling toward us in Him who spares—spared, as a stranger might be, who is nothing to Him. What would life eternal be? What would innocence itself be? What would both together be, without love to us in the heart of God? Just an eternity without a summer and without a sun. But it is no such cheerless prospect that awaits us. God will spare us "as a man spareth his own son." On the great judgment day, every

[1] *A Journal of the Life of Thomas Story*, 13.

accuser that assails us will be answered by Himself and answered from His own remembrance-books; and when, at last, the trial through, the process ended, He can spare us righteously, He will gather us in His arms, and clasp us to His bosom, saying, "These my sons were dead, and are alive again; they were lost, and are found."

¶ In a letter to his youngest sister, announcing his intention to offer himself for foreign mission work, Henry Martyn wrote: "I am thankful to God that you are so free from anxiety and care; we cannot but with praise acknowledge His goodness. What does it signify whether we be rich or poor, if we are sons of God? How unconscious are they of their real greatness, and they will be so till they find themselves in glory! When we contemplate our everlasting inheritance, it seems too good to be true; yet it is no more than is due to the kindred of 'God manifest in the flesh.'"[1]

2. But the full promise of the text is greater still. "I will spare them," says God, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"—that kind of son. In other words, "I will spare him admiringly, I will spare him approvingly." A man usually would spare his own son in any circumstances. Though he were a son that served him not, he would labour to spare him till the going down of the sun. See, for instance, how David would have spared Absalom—a wicked son that would never have spared his father. David's charge to all his captains was "Beware that none touch the young man Absalom." And when, notwithstanding, Absalom perished, and news reached his father that it was even so, his bitter cry was this—"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Yes, a man would even spare his own son that served him not. Of course it would be only pityingly; still, pityingly, he would do it. But it is not thus that the Lord will spare His people, for He will spare them approvingly, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"—not as David would have spared Absalom, but as Abraham would have spared Isaac, that beloved son in whom he was at all times pleased.

God will spare us approvingly, as having much in us to approve, much in us to admire (mystery of mysteries!), much in us to

[1] J. Sargent, *Life and Letters of the Rev. Henry Martyn*, 28.

reward and crown. In the day of Christ, remembrance will be made of every service that we ever did. Nothing will be forgotten —not even the cup of cold water given by His poorest people. It will be remembered how, when Christ was hungry, we fed Him; when thirsty, we gave Him drink; when a stranger, we took Him in; because, doing so to the least, mayhap, of His many brethren, we did it unto Him. To ourselves our services may seem so few, and the few so feeble, that we conclude they must be nothing in the sight of God. Ah! but He treasures them to-day, that He may tell of them at last, and then say, "Servant of God, well done."

¶ Forres suggests the name of Martin, who was a short time in the ministry after Mr. Murker's ordination. He was a Haldane student, and of him the story is told that a military gentleman, who was one of his stated hearers, remarked one day—"Why, Mr. Martin, if I had power over the pension list, I would actually have you put upon *half pay* for your long and faithful services." Mr. Martin replied—"Ah, my friend, your master may put you off in your old age with *half pay*, but my Master will not serve me so meanly. He will give me *full pay*. Through grace I expect a full reward."[1]

¶ Here [in a letter written by Oliphant to Alice L'Estrange, who afterwards became his wife] is another fine apprehension of that more magnanimous view of Christian work and recompense which was dear to those visionary souls:—

"I was thinking to-day, darling, how it would help us, to realize that all pleasures, joy, and happiness must never be considered except as being the accident of service. The mistake of the popular theology is that it makes people desire their salvation for its own sake, instead of its being the accident of our working for other people. It seems very hard upon God that He cannot invest His service with delight without our having a tendency to drop the service and appropriate the delight. We have thus got into the habit of putting the cart before the horse. . . . We are not forbidden to enjoy intensely the pleasure He attaches to the fulfilment of our highest duties; but the love of those highest duties must be greater than that of the delight which they impart."[2]

[1] J. Stark, *John Murker of Banff*, 175.

[2] Mrs. Oliphant, *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant*, 246.

III.

A Peculiar Treasure.

"They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure."

The Lord Jesus when on earth was one of the poorest of men. He was born to poverty; He was cradled in a stable; He went through His brief life on foot; He had no home during His ministry in which to lay His weary head; and His crucified body was buried in a family tomb borrowed from one who was almost a stranger. Yet He was all the time laying the foundations for the most magnificent possessions in the universe of God. He was accumulating the only treasures that can outlast this fleeting globe. They are the innumerable human souls redeemed by Him unto everlasting glory. To them His prophetic eye looked forward when He said, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." More closely rendered, the passage is, "They shall be my *peculiar treasure* in the day I act."

¶ There are very few alterations in the Revised Version which give us a keener pang than this one. The time-worn phrase "When I make up my jewels," has been so precious that it seems almost sacrilege to touch it. But, except for the hallowed associations of the Authorized Version, the Revised Version is equally precious. The word *segullah* is one of the most endearing terms in the Hebrew language. Its *locus classicus* is to be found in 1 Chron. xxix. 3, where we find that David had prepared for the temple 3000 talents of gold and 7000 talents of silver; but over and above this, David had a *segullah*, "a private treasure of his own of gold and silver," and this he was willing to dedicate to the same purpose. That part of a man's possessions, then, which he values most of all is his *segullah*. The word occurs in Exod. xix. 5: "If ye will obey . . . ye shall be to me a *segullah* above all peoples"; Deut. vii. 6: "Jehovah has chosen thee to be a *segullah* to himself"; and in the passage before us, the Lord says: "In the day that I do make"—"that day," "the day of the Lord," "the unique day," so often mentioned in the prophets—"they shall be mine, a peculiar treasure."[1]

¶ Some people are afraid lest the thought of God's people being His jewels should be lost by this rendering, but it is not.

[1] J. T. Marshall, in *The Expository Times*, vii. 18.

If you read it as it is in the Authorized, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels," you have an idea conveyed to your mind that a day is coming when God will gather His jewels and make them up into one great whole; but this, while perfectly true, is nevertheless a very partial idea. The real idea is best expressed thus: "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I act—my jewels." The word "jewels" is in the nominative case in apposition to the pronoun "they," at the beginning of the sentence, "They shall be mine in the day when I act, my special treasure." So that you have not merely the assuring and blessed word that God will gather these people together, His own precious treasure; but there is another word, which goes deeper and is more full of blessed assurance still, that God is coming "to do"—and "to act," coming in upon all this indifference to set it right; and God says, "In the day I act, these people who have been faithful, and have feared My name, and thought upon My name, shall be My special treasure." You see there is nothing lost. We still have the sweet assurance that He will gather His own people as His jewels; but we have also the great assertion that He is coming to act, that while the present is man's day, God's day lies ahead. He will manifest Himself in greater power and glory than ever before. "In that day they shall be Mine, My jewels, My special treasure."[1]

1. It seems, then, that the Lord of Hosts has something, even in this evil world, on which He sets a high and peculiar value; notwithstanding there is so much that He condemns,—sometimes as if *all* were evil. Indeed, it were very strange if He had not, when we consider what it is for Him to have formed, sustained, governed, a world. Think of this mighty globe of matter! Why, it requires an angel's faculty to conceive any adequate notion of its very magnitude. There never was a man on earth who had space enough for it in his mind, if we may express it so. And then think of all its elements—its marvellous order, the laws of Nature (invented, established, maintained in perpetual force), its productions, and then, its relation to the heavens, as well as the mighty scheme of Providence, and the whole system of spiritual government. Now in so vast a system of existence, and so immense and various an economy of operation and regulation, there should be found something peculiarly precious, of which He may say, by eminence—"It is mine."

[1] G. Campbell Morgan, "*Wherein?*" 85.

2. Who are God's "peculiar treasure"? God estimates them not by their physical structure, not by their mental qualities, not by their learning or wealth, but by their harmony or disharmony with His will, by their sympathy or want of sympathy with His character and authority, by their dominant thoughts and feelings concerning Himself. You tell me what a man feels, thinks, and does in relation to God and I will tell you what God's estimate is of that man. In verse 16 we have a full description of the small remnant of faithful ones whom God designates His peculiar treasure.

(1) "They feared the Lord"—not that guilty tormenting fear which drives man away from God, which shudders with remorse in His presence, which trembles beneath His frown, which seeks, like Adam, guilty, a hiding-place where God is not; but that holy fear which reverently approaches God, which devoutly yearns for His fellowship, and yet is awed by a sense of His nearness, that fear which covets His favour, and whose highest heaven is to live in the light of His approval, that fear which remembers His covenant and submits to His kingly authority.

(2) "They thought upon his name." Twice He had revealed that Name to their fathers; once to Moses as the "I Am" and once to Abraham as "I am God All-sufficient." To Moses He proclaimed *what He is in Himself*, the "I Am," the Self-Contained, the Self-Existent, the Absolute, the Source of life and being. To Abraham He proclaimed *what He is to His people*, "God All-sufficient," the All-satisfying portion, the All in All. This Great Name was ever in the thought of the faithful Remnant; they pondered over it as revealed to their fathers; they gloried in its infinite superiority to the gods of the heathen from whose bondage Jehovah had delivered them; they remembered what that Name had done for them and for their fathers before them and were *thankful*; they thought of the infinite resources of that All-sufficient Name and were *trustful*.

(3) "They spake one with another." They not only thought about God in solitude and silence, but they also cheered and strengthened one another in evil times by rehearsing together the wonderful things which God had done for them and for their fathers. It was no empty idle talk; it was so good that Jehovah hearkened and heard; so precious was it that God bent His ear,

put Himself in a listening attitude to hear every word they said. God not only heard the talk, but it was so pleasing to Him that He wrote it in a book, which He calls "the book of remembrance," kept before Him for them that fear the Lord. These are the men whom God calls "a peculiar treasure."

Notice the gracious recognition of true piety. It is not lost, but is always recognized in its surrounding obscurity. Here in this chapter which contains the text we find a prophetic rebuke launched against the rebellious sacrilege and infidelity of the people. The general feeling and conduct of the time tended to obscure the grace of piety, to introduce an element of revolt which was antagonistic to it. Amidst this eclipse and conflict we find a Divine alacrity in noting, and a quick complacency in presenting, the main features of fidelity and truth. God had His hidden ones, and He knew and marked them, knew where to find them, to call up His reserves, even though they did not form any conspicuous band amidst the Babel of unbelief. Although the social aspect of the time showed the world at variance with God's truth, there were still some who held it precious, and would not let it go. They failed to find sympathy from the world, but they kept together and they "spake one with another." The great world took no notice of them, but the Lord heard their loyal interchange, and blessed them. They never gathered—this people of the Lord—they never gathered in their little groups to think upon His name but He took mark of them. The spoken prayer and the silent prayer were registered by Him. The sympathetic link forged between the Lord and them that feared Him trembled with every mark of their fidelity and moved with no uncertain pulse within their heart. It is always so. The Christian can never be deserted or alone, but will always be Divinely supported. If the child has recognized the Father's house as his home, and has gone back to it after never so ungrateful a departure, the welcome never falters, the rejoicing never flags, the fatted calf and the best robe are ever ready, because the dead is alive again and the lost is found. No matter what social humour, no matter what whims of fashion may obscure His meaning from the world, amidst all conflict the movement of the soul is recognized, the children of God who fear His name shall find a book of remembrance in which their names are written, they shall find

the Divine Listener with them when they speak one with another, and "they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

3. They are precious to Him. That is the idea especially involved here. God will delight in acknowledging them as His peculiar treasure, in whom His soul delights. As those rich in jewels have a peculiar pleasure in exposing them to the inspection of admiring friends, so God will delight in displaying His treasure before friends and foes. Before an assembled universe He will testify to His peculiar pleasure in those who were His faithful witnesses on earth—those who professed Him in the face of all the opposition, obloquy, and shame they encountered from a godless world. God will now show His delight in them by planting them as stars for ever and ever in the firmament of glory, in holding them forth as a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty in His right hand, and in rejoicing over them with joy and singing.

What is it that makes a thing precious?

(1) *The sense of ownership.*—God has formed and fashioned us for Himself. For Him we were created, and this frame in which our spirit is enshrined testifies in all its lines of adaptations and uses, in all its marvellous anatomy, to the God that created it. We have given ourselves to other lords that have had dominion over us. Every one has gone his own way, all astray from the protection and the control of Him whom we were formed to confess. God tells us that it shall not always be so; that there is coming a time when He will claim His own, and that edict which was sounded in the day of our birth shall be echoed in the day of our redemption. The purpose of our creation shall be vindicated. We were not formed simply to eat and drink and sleep. God never made these bodies for the mere uses of this world, or for the enjoyment of temporary and fleeting pleasures. He has put the signet of infinity upon them. They are fashioned and formed for immortal joys and immortal living. When in the resurrection they shall be refashioned according to His own body and His own will, it shall then be manifest to whom we belong. Now, sometimes, when we look in the mirror, it would seem an awful reflection upon God to call ourselves His. For there are

lines of sin sculptured in our faces; there are shades of shame that creep over our features. "It shall not be so," saith the Lord. "They shall be Mine, and be known in their adaptation for the life to which they have been called."

(2) *The fact of purchase.*—Is that thing ours which we have bought by current coin in the market, and for which we have paid its highest possible value? If so, how much more do these belong to God whom He hath purchased for Himself, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of His own beloved Son! Surely none will question God's right to those He purchased at so great a price. Law and justice will not do so, for they have long ago proclaimed—"Deliver from going down to the pit for we have found a ransom." They are fully satisfied with the return made to their claims. Hence, they have surrendered every claim to those once lying under the curse and doom, Christ having been made a curse for them. Satan dare not do it. For though at one time he could claim sovereignty and dominion over them—though at one time he ruled in them as the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience—yet his unjust usurpation has long been overturned, and he has now nothing in them. All his claim to them rested wholly upon their own sinful and willing submission to his yoke; but they have now cast it off, with as thorough a hatred as they once had delight in it. Hence, his they are no longer. The reigning power of sin, the blinding influence of spiritual death, by means of which they had been so long kept in his degrading servitude, are now removed, and they have escaped for ever out of the fowler's snare. Hence, this adversary can no longer lay claim to them. And no other creature can, for they are God's, who loved them, and saved them, and washed them in the blood of the Lamb, and hence has secured an uncontroverted right to them.

¶ Turn to Matt. xiii. 45, and look at that sweet parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." In reading that parable, I used to think that the Lord Jesus Christ was the pearl of great price, I was the merchant man, and the price which I paid was one sin and another which I gave up to accept Christ. Now, in reading this Blessed Word, I can find no place in which the sinner is said to purchase Christ, or eternal life, or anything else.

Certainly in that beautiful chapter in Isaiah the sinner is invited to "come, buy wine and milk"; but it is "*without money and without price*"—if we are not to pay anything, then it is a *gift* which we receive, not a purchase which we make. Again it is said, "Buy the truth and sell it not"; but this is for the Christian, and not for the unsaved soul. The sinner cannot purchase salvation, Christ has purchased it. The Lord Jesus Christ has purchased His Church; He was the purchaser, not the Church. Remember it makes all the difference in the world to make sure of this, because the buyer has the right to sell. If I had purchased Christ, then I could part with Him; but if He has purchased me I cannot part with Him, I am His by right of purchase. Men do not buy with the intention of selling at a loss. So when the Lord Jesus Christ purchased the Church, He paid a very high price for it, and He can never part with it until He gets a higher price; *that He can never get.* He laid down His own life for the Church, and the Church is safe until a higher price be offered. Eighteen hundred years ago, Satan offered a price—"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The price was too low. Christ was about to pay His life-blood for the Church, and He would not sell it for these earthly things. Turn to one or two passages to prove this point. In Acts xx. 28 we read: "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." There you get the merchant man, the pearl of great price, and the price paid. Again in Gal. ii. 20: "Who loved me, and gave *himself* for me." Once more, in 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20; vii. 23: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price . . . be not ye the servants of men."[1]

(3) *The pain of preparation.*—The diamond has to undergo a rough and rude process before it can glow and sparkle, burning with many-coloured fires, and flashing with matchless lustre. The lapidary must grind it on his flying wheel, and polish it with its own dust before it can pass into the hand of the jeweller to be set in a golden crown, and become a fitting ornament for a monarch's brow. So with the Christian. He must be sanctified and purified, and made meet for the Master's use. By the hammer of His Word, God breaks the heart of stone, and changes it into a heart of flesh. Often He casts the people whom He intends for great honour into the furnace of affliction, where He purifies them in seven-times-heated fires. It is thus that He takes away the dross and refines them; and through a painful

[1] H. Moorhouse.

process destroys the power of sin in their hearts, and prepares them for heaven.

¶ Lately, I visited a famous pottery. In one room I found a young lady painting a beautiful flower on a vase. I said, "You take a great deal of trouble with that." "Yes, it takes me a long time to do it." "But what is the use? With my finger I could in a moment spoil the flower. How do you manage to keep the painting on the vase?" "When I have finished the painting, a man comes and takes the vase to the fire, and after it has passed through the fire no power in the world can take it off." The Lord Jesus Christ would paint on us the likeness of the lovely Rose of Sharon, contact with the world takes it off; but He puts us in the fire and burns it in: then it will not rub off. The lessons learned in the fire of affliction are never forgotten. I suppose we all know that, and every Christian learns at length to thank God that he was afflicted and had passed through the fire.[1]

4. What is the security? The word of "the Lord of hosts." No further guarantee is needed. The name comprises all perfection. His throne is built upon the promise. Two immutable things make it impossible for God to lie. Our cause is His, and all His attributes are interested in our salvation, and all the infinite resources of His empire stand pledged for the future blessedness of every saint. "The Lord of hosts"—no matter how the term is understood, it is fraught with ample assurance for the faithful, and its sound breaks upon the ear like the anthem of the resurrection and the choral greeting of the seraphim. Refer it to the angels, who bear His messages, and minister to the heirs of salvation; and with such a host on your side how can you fear the future? Refer it to the human race, whose hearts are all in His hand, whose plans are subject to His providence, whose very wrath and malice are made tributary to the interests of His redeemed people; and with such agencies in your favour how can you question the result? Refer it to the saints themselves—the little flock becoming a great multitude that no man can number, marching up from every region of the earth, from every island of the sea, with the chant of joy that wakes the echoes of the morning stars, and makes eternal jubilee in heaven; and with such security for your hope, how can you doubt the consummation?

[1] H. Moorhouse.

God hath so many ships upon the sea!
His are the merchant-men that carry treasure,
The men-of-war, all bannered gallantly,
The little fisher-boats and barks of pleasure.
On all this sea of time there is not one
That sailed without the glorious name thereon.

The winds go up and down upon the sea,
And some they lightly clasp, entreating kindly,
And waft them to the port where they would be;
And other ships they buffet long and blindly.
The cloud comes down on the great sinking deep,
And on the shore the watchers stand and weep.

And God hath many wrecks within the sea;
Oh, it is deep! I look in fear and wonder;
The wisdom throned above is dark to me,
Yet it is sweet to think His care is under;
That yet the sunken treasure may be drawn
Into His storehouse when the sea is gone.

So I, that sail in peril on the sea,
With my beloved, whom yet the waves may cover,
Say: God hath more than angels' care of me,
And larger share than I in friend and lover!
Why weep ye so, ye watchers on the land?
This deep is but the hollow of His hand?[1]

[1] Carl Spencer.

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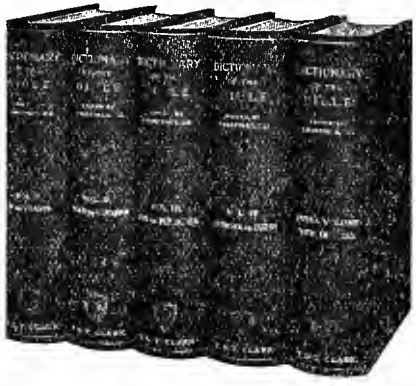

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